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ABSTRACT

Written by teachers for teachers of elementary school students, the 20 articles in this collection are designed to provide insights into the way children learn to write and to encourage teachers to examine their own theories and perceptions of writing and writing instruction. The articles are grouped in five sections. In the first section, six primary-level teachers explore writing in the early grades, illustrating how writing begins and how teachers can help in the process. The four articles in the second section deal with student teacher conferences, offering examples of techniques teachers can use to talk with students about their thinking and writing. The third section contains four articles that draw connections between reading and writing, showing how young readers' comprehension and interpretive skills improve when reading and writing are taught together. Writing evaluation is discussed in the three articles comprising the fourth section, while the three articles in the final section contain teacher reflections showing how their first hand experiences as writers and learners transform their practices and perspectives. The book also contains a bibliography of materials dealing with the teaching of writing, examples of student writing and drawing, and excerpts from transcripts of student-teacher conferences. (FL)

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Understanding Writing

Ways of Observing, Learning & Teaching

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AND NANCIE ATWELL

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K-8

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FOREWORD

Writing has long been neglected in elementary education. In the early grades "writing" has often meant little more than handwriting; in the upper elementary grades "writing" has meant an occasional story or report. Language Arts textbooks have regularly ignored all but the mechanics of writing. Fortunately, recent efforts in basic research and teacher training have begun to change this picture. Not only has writing become a central part of many elementary school curricula, but the very assumptions about what elementary students can do have changed. Both research and classroom practice suggest that we have long underestimated the capability of children to write.

The Northeast Regional Exchange, Inc. is pleased to publish this collection of articles, *Understanding Writing: Ways of Observing, Learning, and Teaching*, because it clarifies and justifies the central role that writing has begun to assume in many schools. It does so not by abstract argument or by detailing recipes for success; it does so by presenting articles where teachers act as field researchers, as careful observers of their students — and of themselves as learners. It includes substantial examples of student writing, student drawing, and teacher-student transcripts so that readers can capture the reality of the processes being described. It is a book *by* teachers and *for* teachers.

The Northeast Regional Exchange hopes that this document will contribute to the improvement of school practice in at least three ways. First, teachers will discover that their approaches to teaching have been embraced by others — that they are not lone experimenters. Secondly, the vignettes and reports included in the book will provide insights into the ways children learn to write, and they will encourage classroom teachers to examine their own theories and perceptions. Finally, we hope that the book will serve as a valuable source of material for in-service programs, curriculum planning, and informal sharing among teachers.

Two members of the NEREX task force on Basic Skills-Writing have contributed considerable time, energy, and talent to this mission. Thomas Newkirk of the New Hampshire Writing Program and Nancie

Atwell of the Boothbay Writing Project have served as editors of this publication. They initiated the idea, solicited and selected manuscripts, edited, prodded and proofed the document into final manuscript form. NEREX is indebted to them for their persistence and vision. The editors were very ably assisted by NEREX staff person Douglas S. Fleming.

J. LYNN GRIESEMER,
Executive Director,
Northeast Regional Exchange

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Introduction

UNTIL QUITE RECENTLY educational research proceeded on the "trickle down theory." The major work was conducted by trained specialists, skilled in statistics and experimental design. The results of these studies were published in technical journals, cited or explained in journals read by teachers, and, in theory at least, applied in the classroom.

This approach had its problems. Even in translated form, the research results often seemed irrelevant to classroom practice. The procedures of data analysis were so complex that the results had to be taken on faith. But most significantly, the experimental procedures frequently failed to examine the settings, particularly the classroom context, where learning took place. Rather, through a process called "context stripping," researchers attempted to match groups and reduce (or strip) the context to all but the single variable to be tested. In many cases this meant removing students from the classroom altogether. The end result often seemed bloodless and unusable. Very little of it trickled into the classroom.

The pattern began to change in the 1970's. A diverse group of researchers including Donald Graves, Marie Clay, James Britton, Dixie Goswami, Shirley Brice Heath, Robert Gunlach, and Glenda Bissex, began to examine writing as it occurred in natural settings. Their reports included generous portions of children's language, and they included the informed observations of the researchers. While lacking statistical rigor, their work had an impact on teachers because the information and insights presented began to match the experience of classroom teachers. This research also provided a model of inquiry that seemed within the reach of many teachers. Research was demystified, no longer the sole prerogative of a special caste. The careful observations of skilled teachers could count as research.

The articles collected in this book illustrate this new role. While practical, the articles do more than merely recount teaching procedures. As the subtitle indicates, the authors are acting as observers, learners, and teachers. These are viewed as a set of interacting activities: the authors are observers of their students, of their teaching, and of their own learning. Each activity acts as a reflecting surface illuminating the others.

The title of the first section, "Beginnings," should be taken in two ways: the section is about students in the early elementary grades who are beginning to write, and it is about teachers beginning a new writing program and experiencing their own insecurities. Kathy Matthews observes a readiness child drawing. In doing so, she illustrates how much can be learned through this type of observation, and she demonstrates fundamental similarities between drawing and writing (a theme echoed in Susan Bridge's article). The articles by Judi Hilliker and Ellen Blackburn should be read as a pair for both illustrate the role of repetition in writing development. This repetition, while frustrating to the teacher who wants to see steady progress, is probably necessary if students are to make developmental advances. Sandra Bonin and Victor D'Ambrosia demonstrate the range of writing types and growth patterns in the early grades. Bonin argues convincingly that students can explore a variety of non-narrative modes in first grade, a possibility ignored by many curriculum guides. D'Ambrosia shows the variable progress his students made in a school year. The final vignette in his article, a portrait of a boy who resists writing for seven months before blossoming, is an especially moving reminder of a major theme in the section — the need for patience on the part of the teacher.

Susan Sowers concludes this section by answering basic questions about invented spelling. The non-standard spellings of young children are often viewed as mistakes to be eradicated. To misspell is to sin, and the failure to punish sin only encourages it. Another equally extreme view holds spelling as so insignificant when compared to "content" that it should be ignored; it will correct itself (later on). Sowers demonstrates that the invented spellings of young children are systematic and intelligent attempts to master the conventions of English orthography. She also shows how the teacher can work with the young speller to help with this mastery.

The second section examines the writing conference. To some the importance given to the writing conference in the section (and in the entire book) may seem excessive. Why should one method be singled out for such attention? Part of the difficulty is with the term "writing conference." The conferences in this section deal with far more than writing — they involve reading, attending to questions, explaining decisions, passing critical judgments. The writing conference is also a reading conference, a listening conference, a speaking conference, and, for young children, a drawing conference. One can argue for its prominence because it integrates so many activities.

But there is a more critical reason for its prominence. To examine the writing conference is to examine the intellectual collaboration that goes on in the classroom. The writing conference is a structured collaboration where the teacher (and other students) ask questions and model procedures that the student, sooner or later, will internalize. The student learns to "give herself a conference." It could be said, then, that the writing conference is a "thinking conference."

The four articles in this section focus on the thinking processes that underlie the conference. Joan Simmons shows how the conference can help students anticipate and plan for writing. Susan Bridge and Sharron Cadieux argue that the procedures and questions used to discuss writing are readily transferable to other activities like drawing and blockbuilding. Susan Sowers examines in detail transcripts of writing conferences and identifies three central operations — reflecting, expanding, and selecting. In reading this section it may be useful to consider these articles as only incidentally about writing. They examine ways of thinking that should permeate the curriculum.

The authors in section three, "Writing and Reading," attempt to break a division that has hindered language arts instruction. Writing and reading have long been taught separately, researched separately, funded separately. The articles in this section show how writing can foster a variety of types of reading comprehension. Paula Flemming, a reading specialist, outlines a program aimed at using writing to teach reading, and she provides impressive evidence that such a program can bring about substantial gains on standardized reading tests.

The other three articles in this section examine comprehension skills that are often unnecessarily delayed in traditional reading programs. Jack Callahan shows how his fourth-grade students used writing to articulate, defend, and extend interpretations of literature. Thomas Newkirk and Mary Ellen Giacobbe focus on critical reading. Newkirk argues that writing, responding, and re-drafting foster evaluative reading and destroy the belief, held by many children (and some adults) that the written text is beyond question or criticism. Giacobbe looks carefully at the development of one first grader and shows the changes in critical judgments over the course of a year.

Taken as a group these articles suggest that writing programs can improve traditional comprehension skills, and they can foster the supposedly advanced skills associated with interpretive and critical reading.

Section 4, "Evaluation," examines a paradox. If every student progresses at his or her own rate, each demonstrating a different configuration of abilities, how are students to be evaluated? Is it possible (Is is fair?) to assign grades? Is not any grading system incompatible with a view of writing as a process? And even if these ethical questions are resolved, there are the pragmatic concerns of dealing with the mound of writing generated. All three articles in this section advocate variations of folder assessment; all three, that is, advocate evaluating the student on a body of work rather than marking each individual paper. Anne Bingham shows how the writing folder can be used in the early elementary grades both as a means of measuring progress and as a way of helping students and parents understand the changes that occur over a school year. Nancie Atwell and Hasse Halley suggest ways of using the writing folder with older students who must be given a letter grade. Halley's method allows for revision and the selection of the student's best work which is evaluated on a holistic scale. Atwell describes a more complex system where the instructor in a conference with the students sets and evaluates individual goals. All three systems involve the teacher in activities akin to research, for to ask how has this student grown is to ask what growth in writing is — a basic research question.

In the final section teachers reflect on their own learning and its relation to their teaching. Debbie Sumner writes on the necessity for both the teacher and the student to take time, to develop what John Dewey has called "an attitude of suspended conclusion." Marna Bunce makes a similar connection between her own anxieties as an emerging writer and the anxieties of her students. Elizabeth Parillo concludes the section with a meditation on safety and her own decision to take risks in her writing.

As with the section on the writing conference, this one is only incidentally about writing. It is about the vulnerability, and the fear, and ultimately the excitement of being a learner. It is about the shortness of breath one feels in an exposed position. And it is about the energy such risk-taking can create.

* * *

In bringing this project to completion we have had help from many quarters. First, our thanks to the authors for providing us with the contents of the book and for meeting the outrageous deadlines we set for them. Thanks also to the students who provided the drawings and writing samples used throughout the book.

In many cases the manuscripts were well on their way to the finished form before the call for manuscripts went out. We want to thank Don Graves, Lucy Calkins, Ron Winslow, Paul Eschholz, and Jane Hansen who worked with many of the authors before manuscripts were submitted to us.

Dennis Robinson provided invaluable help in making the decisions about layout, typeface, and cover design. He also gave us needed assurances that the project could be done.

The book would not have been possible without the support the National Endowment for the Humanities and state Title 4 officials have given to writing institutes. The institutes have not only helped improve writing instruction, but they have helped classroom teachers take leadership roles in the profession. They have had a major impact on the authors and editors of this book.

Finally, our profound thanks to the Northeast Regional Exchange for giving support to this project when it was nothing more than a glimmer. And our special thanks to Doug Fleming who kept us to a timeline that at first seemed impossible and who has worked with great tact to help us at critical junctures.

T.N.
Durham, New Hampshire

N.A.
West Southport, Maine

Beginnings

A Child Composes

by KATHY MATTHEWS
Rockwell School
Atkinson, New Hampshire

"I KNOW WHAT I'm gonna write about today," Stephanie declares as she opens her journal to its appropriate blank page. "I'm gonna write about the skunk that I saw. He always comes to our house to get lettuce." Reaching across the table, Stephanie chooses a number two pencil from the writing caddy.

"How did you decide to write about the skunk?" I inquire.

"I don't know," Stephanie shrugs as she sets about her work. "I just thinked about it."

Stephanie has a story to tell about a personal experience. Like any author she will work diligently to express the experience and will travel through a process that is both exciting and frustrating. She will be required to solve problems of time and space as well as sequence of action. She will find it necessary to revise her first attempts, perhaps even her second and third. Voice and style will identify this piece as her own as easily as it identifies the work of William Steig or Beatrix Potter. What her writing will lack is a printed message.

Writing for six-year-old Stephanie, as for any child at this developmental level, does not include groupings of letters, words, and sentences, yet this has never prevented her from communicating in written form. She has been composing since her toddler years, her messages steadily evolving from scribbles and mandalas to her present level of detailed schema. Invented and conventional spelling will follow in this developmental cycle, but for now her message is expressed primarily in drawing.

Stephanie half-heartedly skips her pencil across the bottom of her page leaving faint grey marks, deliberately askance. Establishing such a base line is a ritual for Stephanie; she is powerless to move on without it.

"What will you do now, Stephanie?"

"The skunk," she replies indifferently. Leaning forward onto the table, shoulders hunched, face close to the paper, she carefully sketches the skunk's outline: round head with triangular ears, oblong body with two circular appendages for legs. Her left hand, which has been resting loosely on the table, retracts in tension as she slows her pencil to carefully shape the tail.

This use of a pencil to make a preliminary sketch is a new tactic with Stephanie. When asked recently why she drew some things in marker, others in pencil, she explained that things she already knew how to draw could be done in markers but new things had to be done in pencil. Stephanie recognizes that she can control and reshape her drawing and is confident in her ability to rehearse and revise new schema to her satisfaction.

"Stephanie, where were you when the skunk came?" I ask.

"Ummm . . . ummm . . . in the house," she mutters without looking up, flicking her hand in my direction as if to dismiss an annoying insect. A large sigh escapes, her nose wrinkles, her head shakes in disgust as she erases part of the tail then fusses to make it right. Cocking her head from side to side she views her work then leans back in the chair, body relaxed. For a moment she sits quietly, pencil swinging in her hand. Casually, she stretches her arm forward to erase the eyes and replaces them with a stripe which extends along the length of the skunk's body and tail. Satisfied, she redraws the eyes and adds a large smiling mouth that transforms an ordinary skunk into a mischievous character.

Head resting on her left arm, eyes horizontal to the paper, she carefully colors in the stripe with black crayon, then begins to scrape the color off with her fingernail.

"What are you doing now?" I ask, anticipating a statement about the error she made in reversing the skunk's colors.

"I'm scratchin' it off," she replies with a shrug, "so it'll be right. I'm makin' it grey." Stephanie is undisturbed by the visual effect a grey stripe creates on the face of a white skunk.

Choosing a red pencil Stephanie draws half a sun in the upper right corner of her page, then rubs off some of the coloring as if it were too dark. Such deliberate action reflects her ability to plan, revise, and manipulate color and line to achieve the desired effect. In this sense she is more in control of her work than her younger peers whose stories evolve as they draw.

When asked why she made the sun red, she gazed at me tolerantly and replied, "'Cause the sun's goin' down." Stephanie has used this setting sun schema previously and recently drew a picture with the sun rising behind the mountains. She is conscious of the interrelationship of time and color in the natural world and can use color to convey this awareness as well as to establish settings for her stories.

Her manipulation of color, however, is confined to established schema such as the sun, the sky, and various animals. The development of new schema requires that her energy be concentrated on the actual creation of the form, thus attributes like color are incidental, only to be addressed once the schema is established.

Stephanie draws a large blue circle near her base line. "Oh, shoot!" she exclaims. Resting her forehead in the palm of her left hand, her mouth twisted to one side, she slowly shakes her head.

"Why are you upset, Stephanie?"

"'Cause I'm tryna make a punkin," she explains. "I was just drawin' the punkin and I made the line too long." Her index finger traces over the errant line showing me the exact problem.

"What will you do now?" I ask.

"I don't know." She shrugs then sits, lips moving silently. Suddenly she descends upon the page, draws two more pumpkins, one lying on its side next to the skunk, the other in the center of the page. To the latter she adds a face, sketching carefully, her nose almost brushing the paper so intent is her concentration.

The pumpkins are a familiar schema, changing each time to reflect her growth and flexibility. Previously they have been an after-thought, a decoration, a "see-what-I-can-do" statement. This is the first time she has composed with the pumpkins as an element in her story.

A large blue square is drawn in the center of the page next to the jack-o-lantern. "I'm makin' a garden," she informs me, anticipating my question. Within the square she draws a row of short vertical lines, then carefully traces over each, her short brown hair bouncing with each stroke as she struggles to achieve the right shade. "I'm makin' corn," she whispers to herself as she draws a short angular line on each stalk. At the base of each she curves a line to imply hills, then rapidly sketches in lettuce and colors over the base line with green pencil.

Stephanie's attempt to show dimension is yet another indication of the depth of her drawing. What she lacks in words she conveys in pictures, clearly reflecting what she knows about the world around her.

Curtains and smoke move in the wind, people leave footprints on the beach, a flock of birds is represented with the closest larger, the farthest away smaller. In a Snoopy and Woodstock story she drew the characters in correct proportion to each other as well as their respective gardens and houses. Like any skilled author she uses details to embellish her stories.

"I'm done," Stephanie declares.

"Tell me about your writing, Stephanie."

"Well, there's a skunk in the garden . . . and he's lookin' for some lettuce . . . and . . . and . . . and the skunk he found a punkin . . . and he took a bite out of it . . . then he took another bite out of it . . . then he left to the garden to get some lettuce. He ate the lettuce, but I growed some more."

When asked if she could write a message about her story, Stephanie drew boxes next to each item and filled these with appropriate initial consonants. She then drew a rectangular shape next to her garden, drew two legs within the rectangle, and a cat's head on top, fussing with the symmetry of the ears. This cat schema usually remains within the confines of the lines; today it has begun to move outside the rectangle. When asked if the cat were part of the story, Stephanie responded that it was only a decoration. She then wrote CAT.

Stephanie is aware that "message" implies the combination of speech sounds into printed symbols and does her best to comply with the adult expectation. "Cat" is the only word she can spell and assumes this will fulfill my need for a message. This simple word, "cat," and the labelling of pictures with consonent sounds represent the very beginnings of Stephanie's transfer from speech to print. They are not spontaneous, and in her view, probably not necessary for the story. My request that she help me sound out words as I write her message proves too stressful. There are too many sounds for her to try to focus in on. Her solution? Dilute the message.

* * *

As teachers we place great emphasis on letters and words as we eagerly await the emergence of the young writer. In doing so, we often overlook the value of drawing as an entity in itself. We need to look more closely so we do not become blind to the components of the writing process that lie within the composing of a drawing.

Labelling to Beginning Narrative

Four Kindergarten Children Learn to Write

by JUDITH HILLIKER
Oyster River Elementary School
Durham, New Hampshire

FIVE-YEAR-OLD MARK added the finishing touch, a lop-sided star, to each wing of another jet. He had been drawing similar jets every day for over a month. Each of the young writers in my kindergarten classroom had favorite drawings that reappeared regularly in their writing books. Claire made smiley-faced suns, Kathy drew rainbows, and Ian's book was full of boats.

I wanted to say, "Can you write about something *different* on the next page?" The children seemed to be stuck, repeating themes because they were safe and familiar. Yet, they weren't bored with writing. The writing table was still the most popular free-choice area in the classroom.

In early September I had given each child a booklet of 20 blank pages. Twice a week they met with me in small groups to draw, talk about their pictures, and write. Most of the children could print the alphabet and identify some consonant sounds before they entered kindergarten, but my invitation to write gave them their first opportunity to use this knowledge. They loved being writers.

By November each kindergartner had established his or her own writing style. The distinctive feature of these styles was the frequent repetition of favorite picture themes with one-word labels. I didn't know how to respond to page after page of jets, smiley suns, and boats.

I understood the major sequences of development in children's writing from reading Don Graves' research. He and his associates spent two years watching young children learn to write in Atkinson, New Hampshire. From their observations they were able to describe the developmental steps in drawing, spelling, and composition that characterized beginning writers. I knew drawing was an essential part of the writing process for young children. First texts were often one-word labels composed in invented spelling. Children recorded initial sounds first, then final sounds, and later added medial consonants and vowels. When a child began to write, each page of text was unrelated to the ones that preceded and followed it. Gradually, as the children mastered mechanical skills, they began to combine words in phrases and sentences. These were the milestones that marked major changes in a child's development as a writer, but the day-to-day steps that existed between the milestones were still uncharted.

The Design

In March, I began a research study to take a closer look at how four young writers in my kindergarten classroom made the transition from labelling to beginning narrative. The children I selected had all written at least one text by February that described an event.

I collected all the writing that the four children had done in school between November and March and arranged it chronologically. Next, I hand-copied both the drawing and the text from each page. All the features except color were retained, but the page size was reduced to a 2 x 1½ inch scale reproduction.

This procedure put the data into a format that made each child's day-to-day development easier to see. Five months of writing samples were displayed on three or four single sheets of paper.

I asked the following questions as I reviewed the children's writing:

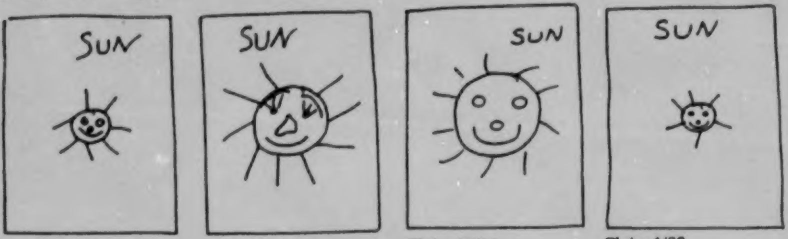
(1) How does the content of the children's drawing and written text change over time?

(2) What relationships exist between the drawing and the text?

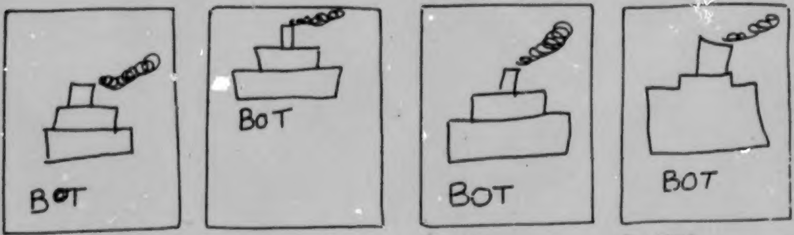
Repetition in Drawing

The amount of repetition in the pictures was more pronounced than I had anticipated. Each of the four children used one or more drawing themes that appeared regularly in their writing. There was little change in the way the child depicted a favorite subject over time. These page reproductions show four versions of Claire's "Sun" and Ian's "Bot."

SERIES A: Repetition in Drawings



Claire 11/17 Clair 11/23 Claire 12/18 Claire 1/28



Ian 11/12 Ian 11/16 Ian 11/23 Ian 12/18

Table 1 shows the extent to which drawing themes were repeated. Claire drew 37 pictures of the sun, and 12 pictures of the sun plus other elements. The sun was the theme of 43% of her total drawings from November to March.

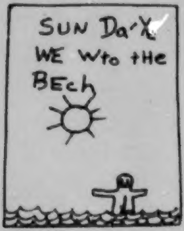
TABLE 1
Theme Repetition in the Drawings of Writing Products, November-March

Child	Theme	No. of Repetitions	Percent of Content
Claire	Sun		
	sun alone	37	
	sun and other elements	12	
		49	Sun 43%
Liza	People		
	self	9	
	family members	9	
	friends	7	
	unspecified	2	
		27	People 42%
	Animals	10	Animals 16%
Ian	Vehicles		
	boat	15	
	rocket	6	
	wheeled vehicle	5	
		26	Vehicles 25%
	People		
	self	7	
	family members	5	
	friends	7	
	unspecified	5	
		24	People 23%
Paul	Holidays		
	Christmas	8	
	Easter	12	
		20	Holidays 31%
	Little Faces	17	Little Faces 26%

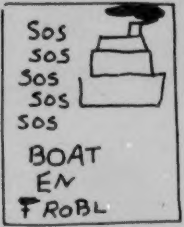
Beginning Narrative

My review also revealed the value of this repetition. Claire, Ian, and Paul had all written their first subject-action sequence based on one of their major drawing themes.

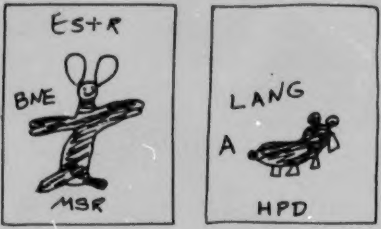
SERIES B: Relating an Event



Claire 1/28



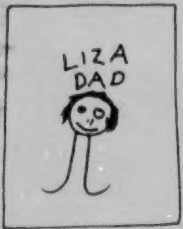
Ian 1/26



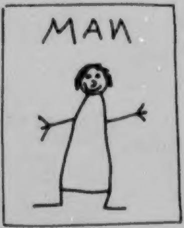
Paul 2/4 (two pages)
Mr. Easter Bunny hopped along.

Claire's "Sunday we went to the beach" was preceded by 18 drawings of the sun, and 5 drawings of a house under a big sun, labelled "Su NEDa" (sunny day). Sunny day became Sunday on 1/28. Ian's "boat in trouble" was preceded by 11 drawings of boats made of rectangles with a puffing smoke stack. Paul's two page sequence, "Mr. Easter Bunny hopped along," had no precursors in drawing, but began his use of Easter as a theme, and followed his inclination to use holidays as a topic.

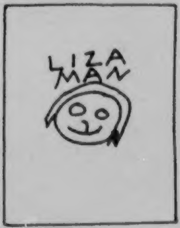
SERIES C: Beginning Statement



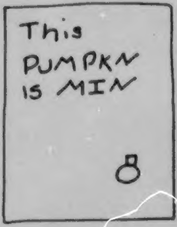
Liza 1/21
Liza's dad



Liza 1/21
Mom



Liza 1/21
Liza's mom



Liza 1/21
This pumpkin is mine.

Liza's first sentence, "This pumpkin is mine," was not related to one of her major drawing themes, but a review of the preceding pages in the book in which it appears shows that Liza was working on conveying possession or ownership in the context of her major theme of people.

The first narrative sequence that each of these children wrote emerged from a drawing theme they had repeated many times. It appears that with each redrawing, the meaning that the picture represents for the child becomes more dense and elaborate. As the associations that the children make with their drawings grow, the writing burst the confines of the one-word label. Beginning narrative emerges.

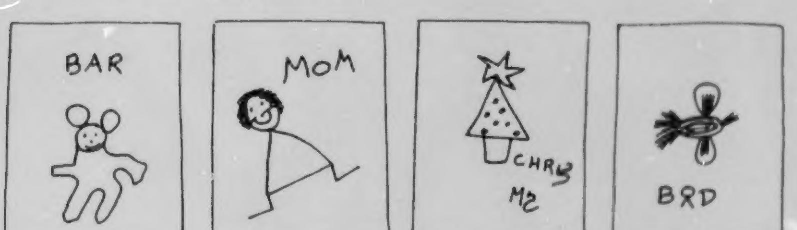
Word Sequences

The first sentences that the children wrote either described the relationship between two elements in their drawings or emphasized a distinctive feature of a single element. The need to express more meaning than a one-word label could convey arose from the child's desire to clarify the implied content of his or her picture.

The children made no distinction between drawing and text when they talked about their writing processes. Claire said the hardest thing about writing was "when people lean over your shoulder and you can't draw and you mess up." Both Paul and Ian indicated that the content of their writing came from the drawing. Paul said he decided what to write "from pictures — my pictures" and Ian said, "you have to write what you drew."

In their early writing all the children drew single objects without backgrounds. The following examples are reproductions of writing book pages done in the fall by the four children in this study.

SERIES D: Single Object Drawings



Claire 11/17
Bear

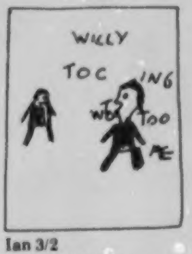
Liza 11/18

Paul 12/3

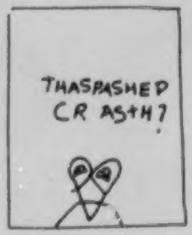
Ian 11/12

Liza continued to draw one-object pictures through March, but the other three children began to include some pictures that contained more than one element. These examples show writing done in February and March.

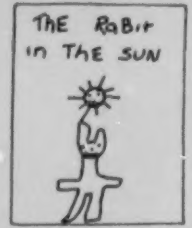
SERIES E: Objects in Relation



Ian 3/2
Willy talking to me.
"What?"



Paul 3/16
The space ship crashed?

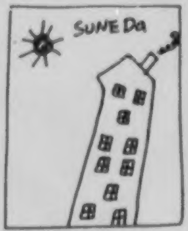


Claire 2/4

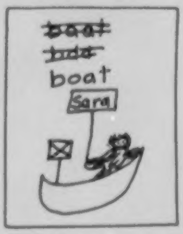
The text that accompanied these drawings explained the relationship between elements in the picture. The drawing of two distinct elements, or the writing of two words that the child perceives as distinct heralds a breakthrough in the child's development as a writer.

Claire had used "SUNEDa" to label a drawing of a house beneath a big sun six times in her writing from November to January, but did not perceive "sunny" and "day" as two separate words. In January she drew "Sara in a boat" and clearly indicated the word boundaries by enclosing the name, Sara, in a sign.

SERIES F: Objects in Relation



Claire 11/6
Sunny day

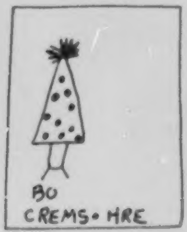


Claire 1/5

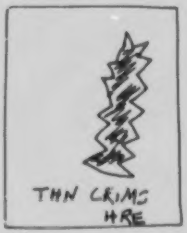
Fifty-six pages of writing preceded Claire's creation of "Sara in a boat." All of them contained single-element drawings (except for the six houses under a sun) and had one-word labels. In her fifty-six pages of writing, two-element drawings appeared 14 times, and on 28 of the pages the written text consisted of two or more words.

Ian's first two word combination, "beg SON" (big sun) was written on 11/23 under a drawing of the sun that filled the whole page. It was preceded by 36 pages of single objects with one-word labels. In the next 36 pages two-word or longer combinations appeared 17 times. Only one of the drawings in the next 36 pages showed two objects, but the written text described a distinctive quality of the object drawn. Examples of these are "blue Christmas tree" (12/13), "thin Christmas tree" (12/18), "hairy thing" (1/5), and "tall cloud" (1/26).

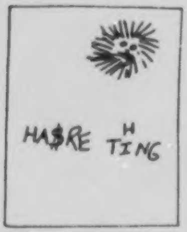
SERIES G: Elaborating on a Theme (Ian)



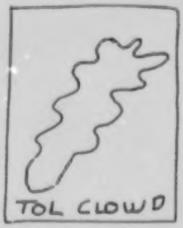
12/3
Blue Christmas tree



12/8
Thin Christmas tree



1/5
Hairy thing

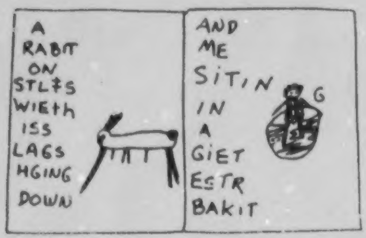


1/26
Tall Cloud

Ian was drawing single objects, but he was writing about qualities that specified and differentiated that object. The label "Christmas tree," was not sufficient. Ian's pictures showed a blue Christmas tree and a thin Christmas tree.

By the end of March, Ian, Claire, and Paul could express complete thoughts and were able to maintain some page-to-page logical connections in their writing. They could relate events, although the sequences of action were often implied in their drawings rather than stated in the text.

SERIES H: Complete Statements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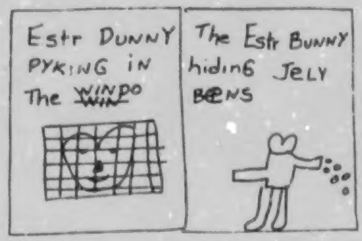
G

Ian 3/4


Estr DUNNY
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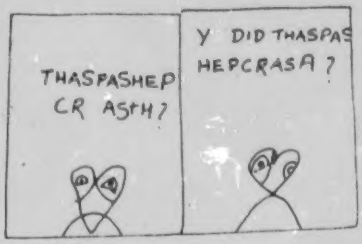
The Estr BUNNY
hidinG JeLY
BENS

Claire 3/16


THASPASHEP
CR ASTH?
Y DID THASPAS
HEPCRASA ?

Paul 3/16

Conclusion

Kindergarten children begin to write by drawing and naming objects with one-word labels. Certain representations or themes have significance for the child and are repeated many times. With each repetition the associations that the child makes with the drawing/text become more complex and differentiated. Once the one-word label is no longer capable of bearing the weight of accumulated associations, word sequences become necessary.

Next year I won't be discouraged by the repetition I find in the children's writing books. Instead of asking them to draw something different, I'll ask them to tell me more about their picture. By exploring favorite themes in depth, rather than trying something new every day, the young writer discovers the need to move from labelling to more complex modes of expression.

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Bissex, Glenda L., *GYNS AT WRK(A Child Learns to Write and Read.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Clay, Marie M., *What Did I Write?* Exeter, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1975.

Temple, C. A., Nathan, R. G., and Burris, N. A., *The Beginnings of Writing*. Boston. Allyn and Bacon, 1982.

"Young Children and Composing," a set of 25 articles by Donald Graves, Susan Sowers, Lucy Calkins, and others describing how young children learn to write and ways teachers can help their students become better writers. Writing Process Lab, Morrill Hall, University of New Hampshire, Durham, NH 03824.

The Rhythm of Writing Development

by ELLEN BLACKBURN
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DANNY WAS "WICKED SCARED" when I gave him his writing journal on the first day of school. Of course he didn't say so then; first-graders try to please. Admission came later in the school year, when his fear of writing, like being afraid of the dark, seemed silly and far away.

I faced his anxiety with a measure of my own. I had taken a two-week training course and was prepared with twenty-three handmade writing journals, but I didn't really understand how children's composing styles develop. Danny was a student who taught me a lot about the writing process. His growth as a writer, although typical in many ways, was also special. Danny pushed each one of his composing styles to its limits until he was confined by it. Each breakthrough seemed to delineate the full potential of that style. Observing Danny helped me to recognize the formulas children use to organize their writing. The limitations of those formulas became clearer to me as Danny struggled each time to break out of them. Once I stopped worrying, I saw his tension as a sign of progress. That progress is visible in the pieces I have chosen to discuss.

Danny worked hard on his first piece of writing. So hard that the marker wore a hole through the paper. His picture mimicked the stiffness in his little body. Danny had drawn a house, flowers, trees, and a sun. I asked him to tell me about his drawing and then to write some of what he told me. Danny could hear initial and final consonant sounds. He wrote "hs," "f," "tre," and "sn." He read them to me and I wrote the words correctly at the bottom of the page.

For a month, Danny continued to draw in his writing journal, thirteen pages of houses, flowers, trees and suns. Then, on October 6th, there was a change in his house drawings. The house was there and so were the flowers and the sun, but smoke billowed from the chimney. Danny wrote his standard labels but wanted to say more. I helped him by producing the sounds he needed. When finished the text said:

> Flower 2 flowers house on fire The people is hurt
> (Note: I have standardized all the spelling in this and other examples.)

A day later Danny drew a similar picture with more smoke and expanded the text to include:

> The people can't get out. They got burned. The fire trucks came. The fire stops. The people go to the hospital.

This piece became Danny's first published book. Danny was proud of his book, but seemed uncertain about how he had produced it. He was so limited by his own drawing formulas. Once he had burned the house down, he seemed to have no other solution for getting action into his writing.

For the rest of the month, Danny's drawings continued to be static; solid and rooted to the page. Before Halloween there were ten pages of pumpkins (pc, cp, pu, pucn). Each day I would talk to him about his feelings and the ideas he had while he was drawing. During this period Danny was inventing spellings for new words. He labeled his drawings and began to stabilize these inventions, repeating the same spelling each time. He was making progress in invented spelling, but there was still no action in his pictures. He was becoming dissatisfied with his topic selection because he couldn't think of any new content to add to his old drawings.

Then, one day at the beginning of November, a change. Danny brought me his journal and there was a person, Danny himself, walking across the page and underneath his picture, a sentence, "I got my hair cut."

"Danny, this is a good topic. You wrote about something that really happened. Did you like getting your hair cut?"

"No."

"You didn't? Why not?"

"It felt weird."

"Weird? Really?"

"Yeah because it's prickly down my neck. I took a shower as soon as I got home."

"That's quite a story. You told me how you felt and you told me what you did after you got your hair cut. Do you think that's good information to add to this piece of writing?"

"Yeah."

Several minutes later Danny returned. To his first sentence, he added:

> I got a haircut. I felt weird. I washed my hair.

"How do you feel about this now?"

"Good!"

I was excited for Danny. He had written about a personal experience. There was both action and an actor in his drawing. During the conference I had helped Danny think about the sequence of events and he had written three sentences in the correct order. I hoped he would continue to write about himself. The next day he drew house, flower, tree and sun.

Danny was not ready for the complexities of personal narrative. Drawing was still Danny's primary means of organizing his writing. Since he couldn't draw the action of his personal experiences, he couldn't write about them. For the next two weeks Danny was stalled.

Then, on November 20th, Danny drew a picture of a tree. It was his standard "lollypop" tree with a round green ball at the top. (Figure 1) Down the side of the tree he wrote:

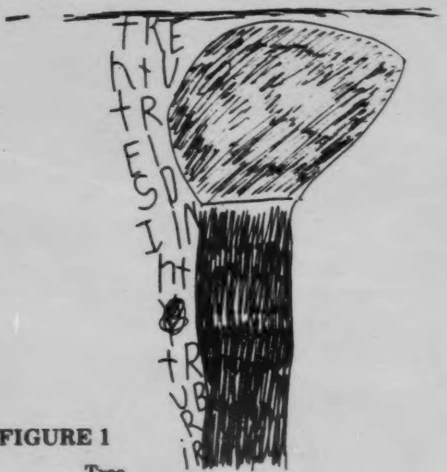

FIGURE 1

Tree
The tree is dead
The tree is bare

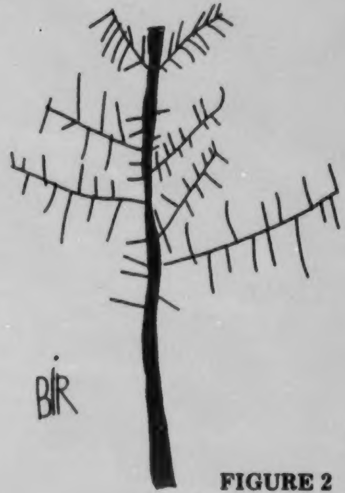

FIGURE 2

Danny was making an observation about change of seasons, yet his picture did not match his words.

"Danny, you said that the tree was bare in your writing, but look at the tree you drew . . . it looks green." Danny looked at his picture. Then he turned the paper over and drew another tree. This time the tree was bare, twigs bristled from every branch. Next to his new tree he wrote: "Bare." (Figure 2) For the first time, the words controlled the picture rather than the picture controlling the words.

Danny had broken his dependence on schema and had revised his drawing. Two days later he wrote, *Snow Melting*. (Figure 3)

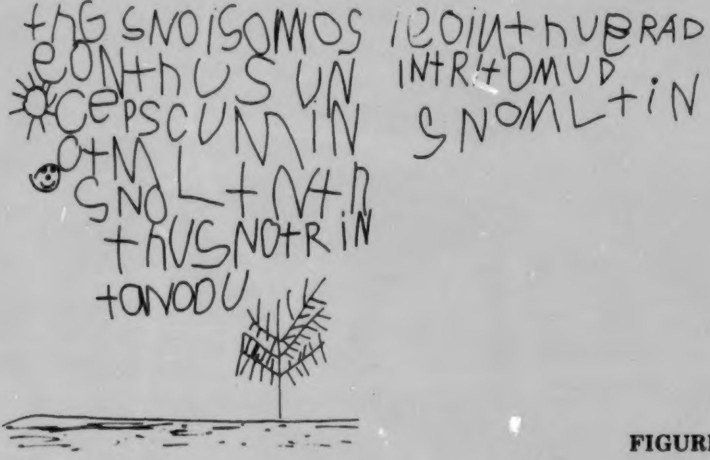

FIGURE 3

The snow is almost gone.
The sun keeps coming out, melting the snow.
The snow turns into water.
It goes into the ground and turns into mud.

At the bottom of the page was the bare tree, but the picture was no longer dominant. The words seemed to be pushing it off the page. Danny had learned that the words can carry the message. He was no longer limited by his pictures. He could use words to tell the action.

In *Snow Melting* Danny had described the natural sequence of snow changing into water when warmed by the sun. Because Danny was an observer and not a participant, he seemed better able to sequence these events. Ordering events became a useful way for Danny to organize his writing.

Suddenly, there was a writing explosion. Between December and March, Danny produced fifteen pieces of writing averaging about eighty words in length. Danny chose topics which would allow him to order events into chain narrative. As he explored the possibilities, his pieces became longer and longer. In February, Danny wrote his longest piece of this genre, *We Were Late For School:*

> We were late for school because we had to eat breakfast. Then we had to brush teeth. Then we had to comb hair. Then we had to set the table. Then we had to get our jackets. Then we said "Bye" to my brother. Then we went to school. There were all kinds of kids. Then we played. Then the bell rang. Then we lined up. Then she called lines. First Graders were last. Then I looked what area I was in. I was in writing. Then I wrote about this. I feel happy writing about it. It is fun writing. I like writing. If you write a lot, you get more books.

Danny had mastered the art of writing chain narrative. This piece was a list of events linked by the word, "then," leading right into the present moment. There was no focus, no central event, just the joy of adding information.

This formula had been a productive one for Danny, yet any formula can become limiting. Danny was having writing conferences with me and with his friends. We asked lots of questions. The chain narrative can answer "And then what happened?" questions, but we were asking "Yes, but *how* did you feel?" and "*Why* did you do that?" These questions were difficult for Danny to answer within the formula he was using. This developing sense of audience forced him to change his style. Audience awareness can be seen in the piece *When It Was Raining*, written at the beginning of March.

> This morning I didn't walk to school. I went over my father's. I didn't want to get wet because I would be wet in school. That's why I went to my father's. When we got to school I went in. I got wet. I didn't get wet, my raincoat did. Then I went in. I ran in. Then I hung up my raincoat on a hook. Splish, Splash.

Danny had begun to anticipate the questions that would be asked in a writing conference and tried to answer them. There was still a hint of the chain narrative in the way he ordered the action, but his writing was now a dialogue between writer and audience. As he was writing, Danny realized that parts of his piece seemed contradictory and needed explanation. Rather than omit those parts ("I got wet") he simply elaborated as he would have in conversation ("I didn't get wet, my raincoat did.").

Danny's audience demanded a deeper level of personal involvement. They weren't satisfied with "what" and "when," they wanted to know "how" and "why." Danny's earlier attempt to write personal narrative (*I Got A Haircut*) had been difficult because he didn't know how to organize and focus his personal experiences. Writing with an audience in mind helped Danny to focus his pieces. On March 19th, just two weeks after he had written *When It Was Raining*, Danny wrote, *I Got New Shoes:*

> I got new shoes. They are brown and they are black too. I like them. They fit me. They are old. I had them for a year and a half. I didn't wear them before. They still fit me a little. They are big a little. Pauline likes them and Mrs. Elliott too.

Danny was still struggling with contradiction in this piece. Gone, however, is the element of listing. Danny had a new perception of time. Time was no longer limited to the immediate past and ordered into a chain of events. Danny was beginning to have a sense of his own lifetime. He could move into the distant past and contrast it with the present. Being able to wear his "new-old" shoes was a sign of Danny's physical growth. The awareness of time demonstrated in his writing was an indication of his conceptual maturity. He continued to explore the dimensions of time — past, present and future — as he worked on his narrative style.

Possessions became Danny's most frequent topic choice for the rest of the year. Of the eighteen pieces of writing he did between March and May, twelve were about possessions. Cars, rocks, a special marble, a pretty shell, every day they traveled to school in Danny's pockets. Having the object in front of him at the writing table, provided a concrete image for Danny, much as his drawings had done earlier in the year. Each object was important to him because of the significant events and feelings associated with it. There was a poignancy about these writings because they revealed so much about Danny's self image and his relationships with others. Danny published *I Found A Good Luck Rock* written on March 23rd.

> I found a good luck rock. When we was putting rocks down the stream, I was going to put it down the stream. Eric's father said, "No, It is a good luck rock." So I didn't put it down. I kept it. I had it for a long time. I didn't get any good luck yet but I like it. It is fun to have.

When Danny brought his "good luck rock" to school to write about, the object helped him to recall the experience of finding it. Focusing on objects as a vehicle for exploring the events and feelings associated with them was a useful formula for Danny for many months. In May, however, I began to see the familiar signs of conflict in Danny's writing. His piece, *My Ball*, was long. He floundered with the beginning. His lead was still focused on the ball and this hampered him.

My Ball was about Danny's relationships with other children. His need for companionship conflicted with his feelings of possessiveness.

> *My Ball*
>
> I brought my ball to school. I play with it a lot. I like my ball. I like playing with it and I bounce it too. It is fun to play with. I play with it and Sherry too and Shelley too. Yesterday I got into a fight with Christopher. He hit the ball out of my hand. I kicked him. He was crying. We had to go in Mrs. Dawson's room. We talked about fighting. Christopher said he wouldn't do it again. When I kick it to Shelley and and she misses it other people kick it and I get mad too. This morning I was playing with it and a girl kicked it, then she tripped me. I got mad. When there is no one to play with, I bounce it and that gives me something to do.

My Ball contained elements from Danny's previous writing formulas. The ball, like his drawings, served as a reference for the development of this topic. Danny's lead sounded very much like a list, a style reminiscent of his chain narratives. Then the piece suddenly gained strength, beginning with the sentence "Yesterday I got into a fight with Christopher." The emphasis shifted from the concrete object to the experience of playing with the ball. The body of the piece was full of activity. Danny ended it effectively with the image of a small boy, alone, bouncing his ball. Soon Danny would be able to identify the experience as the topic and wouldn't need the possession as a referent. Instead of being dependent on a formula, perhaps now the content could determine the form of his writing. Unfortunately, the school year ended before Danny made that next transition in his writing.

Danny's first year as a writer was full of starts and stops, surges and retreats, but he moved forward. He became better at his craft and so did I. From Danny I learned that each writer has a rhythm of his own. I learned to be a careful observer of children's patterns, to anticipate signs of change, and to know when intervention would be most effective. It is a delicate art. I understand it better because of Danny's perseverance.

During his year in first grade, Danny filled a forty-page writing journal, composed forty-one pieces of writing and published ten books. He started with one word labels and ended the year writing personal narratives. One day in June, he sat with the writing journal I had given him at the beginning of the year. Using a fat, brown crayon, he drew large X's across the ten pages of pumpkins he had made in October. The critic was at work, prompting him to revise and edit. Danny was aware of his progress.

Beyond Storyland: Young Writers *Can* Tell It Other Ways

by SANDRA BONIN
Maple Wood School
Somersworth, New Hampshire

KEVIN BOUNDED INTO my first-grade classroom on Monday morning and announced that he had learned a new game over the weekend.

"Would you like to tell about it at circle meeting?"

"No, I'm gonna write it at writing time. Then everybody can read it and they'll know how to play it."

Kevin's decision to write the directions to the game would have surprised those educators and curriculum experts who believe young children use only narrative forms of writing (that is, stories told in chronological order). Exercises such as story starters, which are designed for beginning writers often focus exclusively on narrative, while the introduction of non-narrative is postponed until later grades when children are expected to write science and social studies reports.

But when I introduced blank writing books to my first graders at the beginning of the year, I discovered that they were able to produce several different kinds of non-narrative as well as narrative writing. Most children started by drawing a picture and printing a one word label such as "house" or "butterfly." Some then moved into what Susan Sowers (in press) calls "attribute books." These sometimes have titles that begin with "All About . . ." and can be classified as early concept books.

Other children experimented with different forms. Tommy wrote:

> Some days I feel good and some days I don't feel good and some days I feel just normal.

When a substitute took over my room one day, Michelle wrote:

> Mrs. Chabot,
> You are a good teacher to us kids. You are the goodest teacher.
> We love you.

During the next several weeks the children continued to write both narratives and non-narratives. I felt that they were comfortable writing the former and were already familiar with the form: stories are an important part of their daily lives, whether the source is television, anecdotes told by friends and families, or children's literature.

However, I didn't want them to concentrate on narrative to the exclusion of the other kinds of writing that were beginning to emerge. I wanted them to become familiar with a variety of forms and to realize that not every piece of writing had to be in chronological order. I began to experiment with ways to encourage non-narrative writing.

I decided to start by calling attention to the non-narratives that children were already producing spontaneously. For example, I encouraged my beginning authors to share their early concept books with the preschool class which was housed in our building. These were three of the favorites:

The ABC Book
by Freddy

A is for apple.
B is for bear.
C is for cat.
D is for drink.
E is for Eskimo.
F is for Fred.
G is for gum.
H is for hammer.
I is for itching itches.
J is for jet.
K is for kite.
L is for lobster.
M is for milk.
N is for no.
O is for operate.
P is for pig.
Q is for queen.
R is for rat.
S is for sock.
T is for top.
U is for umbrella.
V is for vest.
W is for whale.
X is for X-rays.
Y is for yawn.
Z is for zoo.

My Dog
by Julie

> I love my dog. He gets sick a lot. I take him in every night. I feed him every night. He is a good dog, too. I love him so much. He is black. He is big. He's outside when I go to school. He stays inside at night. My dog is five. He is going to be six on the fourth of July. My dog's name is Shaney.

The Animals' Voices
by Kevin

A cat does meow.
A dog does ruff, ruff.
A lion does roar.
A tiger does roar, too.
A pony does hee-haw.
A pig does oink, oink.
A dinosaur does ooga.
A frog does ribbit.
I do Hi!

In addition, I asked the children to collect their cookbooks and display them by the stove in the housekeeping corner. These ranged from Kevin's mudpie recipe to Jonathan's directions for preparing lunch:

> This is how you make a mudpie. You add dirt and water and then you flatten it and there it is.

> Make a sandwich. Put on pickles. Put on fish. Put on ham. Put on cheese. Put on peanut butter. Put this on a plate. Make a salad. Make bacon. Make eggs.

Michelle and her classmates read their letters to the class, then sent them to recipients and hoped for a quick reply. Children wrote directions to games and posted them around the room along with any materials needed to play. Chris displayed these directions with some small, round rocks:

Rock Marbles

> This is how you play rock marbles. One player gets a rock and the other person gets a rock. You dig a hole and you throw the rocks, but you throw them at different times. Then you take turns shoving them with your finger. The person that gets them in the hole first wins the game.

The incidence of non-narrative writing increased and more children began to experiment with the different types.

Then I realized that some kinds of non-narrative might not be produced spontaneously and that the children might not be exposed to them at all. I decided to introduce some forms that had not yet appeared.

I began to read examples of non-narrative writing during story time. Starting with forms that the children had already become familiar with, I added poems, biographies, songs, menus, newspaper articles, lists, and joke and riddle books. We collected as many examples of these as we could find and the children sorted them into the various categories. When someone wrote a non-narrative piece at school, it was put in the appropriate pile. After a while, the sorting of books and papers became too cumbersome so the class made a large bar graph which showed the different categories we had discovered. We added to it each time someone found a new example.

I tried to set up a variety of situations which would call attention to different forms and encourage students to try them. For example, the children published their lists or displayed them around the room. Katie put hers in the science area:

> This is Good Food
>
> This is good food: apples, oranges, lettuce, cucumbers, tomatoes, sunflower seeds, broccoli, spinach, apple juice, orange juice, bananas, carrots, grapes, zucchini, tomato soup, chicken soup, pizza, milk, salad watermelon, onions, peppers, ham, hamburgers, peas. peaches, corn, fish, steak, hot dogs, bologna, and mustard.

We sang songs with guitar accompaniment. Poets hung their typed and matted pieces in the library beside a display of poetry books. Budding humorists illustrated their joke and riddle books and shared them with upper grade classes. Some children wrote jokes they were familiar with, and others made up their own. Eric tried both:

> What does a cat have that no other thing has? It is kittens. What did the big chimney say to the little chimney? You are too young to smoke. What did the rug say to the floor? I got you covered. What is green and black and white? It is a zebra eating a pickle. What has two legs? Sometimes it is a girl and sometimes it is a man. It can not move. Sometimes it has a mustache. It is a statue. What has no legs and it can move and sometimes it is big and sometimes it is little? A snake. Why did the hen cross the road? 'Cause it was on the other side of the road.

When children wrote articles about what was happening in the classroom, I published them in newspaper form and the reporters distributed the latest copies around the school. Marty reported on the Young Author's Contest:

> At school we have a young author's contest. It's when you write your best story and you can't have any help. We can do it at home or at school. Ms. Bonin will publish it and judges will look at all of the stories. If you win you get to go to Concord and have a party. If you lose you have a party at the school.

In evaluating the children's growth as writers of non-narrative, I noticed that their earlier attempts tended to be short and to stay within the boundaries of the forms they were using. Jonathan's report of the Lynn, Massachusetts fire is a good example:

> The Lynn fire burned down seventeen buildings. The smoke looked like fog. It looked like a bomb hit the building. Lots of fire trucks were there.

As the year progressed I found that their writing became more versatile and not as bound by form. Children began to combine different kinds of non-narratives to produce pieces which could fit into more than one category. Tommy's "Our Bookworm" could be classified as reporting or directions:

> We are making a bookworm. We want it to go out of our room and and into the commons area. It is almost out of our room. How we make it is that we read our published books to the big kids and we go to our teacher and she gives us a part of the bookworm and we write the author (who it is by) and the title and our name. We cut them out. Our teacher hangs them up.

Marty's "Rain Makes Stuff" could be a concept book or a poem depending on how the lines are arranged:

> Rain makes slush; ushy, bushy slush.
> Rain makes mud; black, ooey mud.
> Rain makes flowers grow; yellow, blue, red, white, pretty flowers.
> Rain makes leaves grow; green and red leaves.
> Rain makes grass grow, green grass grow.
> Rain makes US grow.

The curriculum guides are wrong. Young children can write non-narrative and do it well. Let's not deprive them of the chance.

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Second-Graders Can So Write

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THERE IS A HUM of voices and the sound of rattling papers in the classroom. Several children are reading silently. Others are drawing, their pencils or crayons working furiously, "sound effects" occasionally accompanying a crucial stroke. Most of the children are writing. They work at different rates, some of them slowly, some of them almost feverishly. Very often they pause in their work, chewing a pencil, scratching their heads quizzically. Their facial expressions vary, too: some are grinning, some are scowling, some appear lost in thought.

My class of second graders is "having writing," as we call it. We do this every day for twenty or thirty minutes. The children write whatever they want to write, although I continually urge them to use their own experiences for subject matter, because on such subjects they are genuine experts. I have also told them not to worry about spelling, punctuation, or any other mechanical skill on their initial drafts. Corrections of that kind are made just before publication, when their ideas have been fully developed, when the real work of writing is finished.

Several children are grouped around my reading table. Diane and Jonathan are preparing final copies of their writing. They have made the content of their work as precise as possible, and they have made all the mechanical corrections. Now they are carefully copying their work onto special paper, which will be bound in book form. Nearby, Jim is sighing impatiently as he waits to read his latest work to me. And

Joyce, meanwhile, is telling me about her summer home on a lake in New Hampshire, so that she can be sure of the details before she begins to write.

The children share their work with me at different times, before, during, or after they have written. All of these times are crucial for young writers. Initially they need help choosing topics and gathering details; as their work develops, they need help organizing and rounding out their ideas. Their work is usually sketchy, often a mere framework, and I encourage them to make additions and revisions, to enrich their writing as much as possible. And finally there are the mechanical corrections to make before publication.

For me this writing period is the most enjoyable part of the day. At no other time do I have such personal contact with each child.

* * *

I began the writing program in my classroom on the first day of school. I gave each child a writing folder and a blank piece of paper, and then I explained the major points of the program, urging them to ignore spelling and punctuation for now, and to write about their own real experiences. I told them that they could raise a hand if they needed a writing conference with me, and that I would regularly be calling them up for conferences myself.

They all looked doubtfully at me.

"Write about what you know," I told them. "Write about something that really happened to you."

Jim's hand went up. "But I don't have anything to write about," he said gloomily. "Nothing ever happens to me."

There it was: the greatest woe of the anxious writer. Jim could not believe that there was anything in his personal experiences of possible interest to anyone.

Jim became my first pre-writing conference of the year. I asked him about his summer. Was it a good summer? Yes, he told me, it was a good summer; so good that he wished it were still going on "right at this very minute." He sighed meaningfully. I refused to be discouraged. I asked him what exactly he wished he could be doing now, right at that very minute.

"I wish I was riding my mini-bike," he declared, grinning.

I needed to ask only a few more questions. Jim became excited. He did have something to write about after all. He dashed to his seat, his head whirling with the details my questions had brought out. He grabbed his pencil and wrote furiously. I was thrilled.

Moments later he was back. "It's finished," he told me proudly. "Can I read it to you?"

"Certainly," I said, a little surprised. He cleared his throat dramatically, stood very straight, held the paper out in front of him, and read:

"I like to ride my motor bike."

We looked at each other.

"Jim, that's a great beginning," I said, groping for words. "But why do you like to ride it?"

Jim talked for ten minutes. He told me about "wheelies," about bike safety, about popping the clutch, about the time he lost his oil cap far from home, about "cutting into third," and much more. His knowledge was obviously very great, and so was his enthusiasm. Well, I said, didn't he want to write down some of those exciting details?

He looked at me. "Well-l-l-l," he said thoughtfully. "No."

In the first days of writing nearly everyone said no to the idea of revision. Most of them wrote something, some of them as briefly as Jim, others with a little more detail. Nearly all of them wanted to read their work to me. But like Jim, none of them wanted to change their work in any way.

These children were in what Calkins (1980) has called the "Random Drafting" stage of writing development. As beginning writers they looked on their work as a kind of play. They wrote for fun, for the novelty of seeing their thoughts on paper. Once written, a piece was finished. There was no going back, not even to insert a word that had been left out. If other people didn't fully understand their writing (like Mr. D., with all his questions), that was simply too bad. These children were writing for themselves, not for any audience.

What advanced the class into the next stage — the "Refining Stage" — was the publication of three books. In mid-September I chose three well-developed pieces and helped the authors make the necessary mechanical corrections. The children copied the final drafts onto special paper that had been cut and folded like the pages of a book. We then made covers out of cloth and cardboard, and bound the pages and the covers together.

All three children read their finished books aloud to the class. The other children gaped in envy. They were impressed by those books. They wanted to hold them and look at them. They wanted to know when *they* could make books. Well, I said, pleased, only their best writing could be published. And from that time on many of them were seized with a new enthusiasm for writing.

* * *

One important characteristic of those first three published authors was that they were *not* all academically-superior students. I had purposely chosen them from each of the three ability levels. I wanted the class to see that anyone could write and be published, regardless of their past school achievement. One of the writers, Heather, had not learned to read in first grade, but there she was, a published author, reading her work along with the others.

The idea of publishing pushed many children ahead into the Refining Stage. Suddenly Mr. D. wasn't the only one seeing their work: *anyone* could read it now, and anyone could say, "I don't really understand this part," or "Why didn't you write more about such and such?" Publishing gave them a more vivid sense of audience. It gave them a concrete reason for refining their work.

As Refiners, then, they were willing to make some changes in the content of their work. They might add a sentence, or delete one; they might put in a whole new section. Occasionally they would entirely rewrite a section to make it clearer or more interesting. They learned to cross out, to squeeze sentences into the margin, to use arrows and asterisks to direct the reader to a new section. They came to enjoy this kind of technical maneuvering. And most importantly, they accepted the concept of the "rough draft," the practice copy, on which spelling and neatness were unimportant. They learned to spend their time on writing, on conveying meaning, without wasting time worrying what their work looked like. They knew a rough draft could be messy because it would all be made neat on the final published copy.

Once I understood the importance of the audience to the writer, I added 15 or 20 minutes to the writing period so that the children could read their most recent work to he class. I encouraged them to read pieces which were not yet published but which were still developing, and then I assigned a task to the audience: it was their job, after each volunteer finished reading, to tell the writer exactly what they liked about the piece, and also what he or she might do to make it better. In this way the writer could receive more feedback from a variety of people, and, furthermore, by critiquing each other's work, by being writing teachers themselves, the children would become more aware of what good writing is.

These critiquing sessions showed immediate results. For one thing, the audience began imitating my conferencing technique, pointing out missing details, awkward sentence structure, repetition, and so on. At the same time they were just as eager to mention the strong points of a writer's work. As a result, children began telling me in our conferences that they had already made this or that change on their own, before sharing their work, because they knew their peers would mention it otherwise.

One thing that the children have always understood, however, is that the suggestions I make during a conference, and those made by the class, are only suggestions. I never insist that a child make a revision. Young writers have to make their own choices about revising, because in this decision-making lies the real value of writing.

* * *

Most of the children in the class spent the school year in the Refining Stage. They've been happy with this stage, too. Many of them genuinely look forward to "having writing." And they've all made progress. Some of them stand out as especially good examples of the growth children can experience as writers.

Heather has clearly benefitted from the freedom this writing program allows. Early in September she wrote:

> My day worst in a sumren and I have denes on ont to the ede.

This translates as:

> My dad works in a submarine and I have been on one, too. The End.

Testing had shown that in first grade Heather had not learned to read or write anything more than her name and a few basic Dolch words, and certainly this early sample of her writing concurs. But the sample also shows that her inability to spell words correctly did not change the fact that she had something to say, something to write about. And she had no trouble reading her work back to me.

In the beginning of the year Heather wrote only a sentence or two at a time, but she wrote every day without fail, beaming with pleasure when she read her work to me. Her folder was the neatest in the class, with all the pages carefully numbered and kept in strict order. Often she would bring the folder to a conference just to look through her accumulated work with me. And she earned the distinction of being among those first three writers in the class to publish a book.

Looking back over some of Heather's early pieces, I am now unable to translate her work. But her difficulties with spelling did not prevent her from writing. Here is Heather's work, "My Ester Book," written near the end of the school year:

> On Ester we have fun hiinghy Ester egg. And my Ester buyey gava us a dasgt fld with candy. And we want to are grnMother we had fun. We have a cult Bunny and me and my birury aet are cult bunny. And we want to are house and we sleepy.

The spelling shows improvement, but more importantly, Heather's writing has progressed, from simple one-sentence statements to a much more fully-developed description. Her mechanical skills are still far from perfect, but there is no mistaking her growth as a writer.

* * *

Almost every child adopted the use of invented spelling with ease. Rob, however, has had some difficulty ignoring spelling and penmanship, and this had made writing difficult for him.

Rob demonstrated a flair for writing from the very beginning. He has a mature and unusual sense of humor, and also an advanced speaking vocabulary, both of which make his writing stand out as unique. For a long time, however, he struggled with writing because he could not accept incorrect spelling or sloppy penmanship, even on a first draft. He would agonize over the shape of his letters, and spend whole minutes trying to spell single words correctly. As a result he didn't like to write. He would write a few sentences and then give up, often disrupting other children who did want to write. One day, for example, I noticed him playing with the water fountain after he had just left a conference to begin a story that he was very excited about.

"Are you finished writing for today?" I asked him, just sounding curious.

"Yeah," he said.

"Is the story done?"

"No," he replied. "I'm stuck. I can't figure out how to spell 'adventurous.' "

"Rob," I said, "I thought you knew that spelling doesn't matter on the first draft."

"Yeah, I know," he said vaguely. He shook his head. "I kept trying to get it. Then finally I gave up."

I talked to him again about the importance of working out his ideas first, and then I sent him back to his story. He finished it this time, and every other word was spelled incorrectly, and the penmanship was barely legible.

It was then I remembered something his first-grade teacher had told me: that he was "very weak" in spelling and word-attack skills, that he needed to be "pushed" to work at them. It occurred to me that perhaps he had been pushed too hard.

* * *

Although the class has been happy and successful in the Refining Stage, the writing teacher's goal for his or her students is always the Interactor Stage. At this more complex level, the writer understands that meaning actually evolves from writing. As the work is revised and clarified, ideas emerge that the writer had not initially been aware of. Perhaps the very purpose of the piece only becomes clear in this way. Interactors therefore draft and re-draft, searching for new meaning. They combine drafts, synthesizing ideas from all of them. As Murray (1980) suggests, the Interactor writes to discover meaning, not simply to convey it.

Happily, late in the year I saw some of my students moving toward this level of writing.

Nicole actually made the first move in September. She brought to a conference eight short pieces all describing animals that she liked or knew something about. She said she wanted to put them together in a book form. Sensing her enthusiasm, I hoped to guide her through some sophisticated revisions. As it turned out, most of the changes she made were minor, involving the addition of a few words here and there. But one major revision she did make was to condense two chapters into one, which in a small way represented a synthesis of drafts.

I brought about the revision by holding up the two chapters for her to examine. One was about caterpillars, and the other was about butterflies, and the two really said just about the same thing. I said, "Nicole, do you notice anything about these two chapters?"

"Well, they sort of go together."

"Do you say any of the same things in the two chapters?"

Nicole carefully reread the chapters. "Yes," she concluded, satisfied I wasn't just exaggerating in order to make more work for her.

"Do you think it's a good idea to say the same things twice?"

"Well, no, but they'll be too short if I take any sentences out."

"What could you do with two short chapters that go together?"

"Put them together?"

"Why don't you try it."

She did try it, and was pleased with the results. She also liked my idea of revising a rather vague chapter dealing with animals in general and making it into an introduction for the book. Once this book was published, introductions became quite the rage.

Jim also made a sophisticated revision when he decided to rewrite the story about his mini-bike. I was thrilled that this was his own idea. He decided to rewrite, he told me, because he was sure he could now "do a much better job than *that*," and he pointed disdainfully at his original version.

Jim and I talked again about his mini-bike, and this time he worked for several days on the story, finally producing a full-fledged book that even had one of those introductions everyone was writing. There was also a table of contents listing the individual chapters, because this time there was a chapter set aside for "Stunts"; another called "Badluck," describing the day Jim lost his oil cap a long way from home; and a third called "The Circle," which describes the dirt track on which he rides his bike.

Here is Jim's "Intruaducktoin":

> This book is about how to ride a mini-bike and how to handle your bike if you have one. And write to Sowerby incorporated if you have anything to add into this book. If you get five tickets off of these books you will win a ZR50. But there are only ten tickets and they are all over the world.
>
> Hope you win! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! ! !"

* * *

Phillip had written a story about finding a wasps' nest in his barn. He was excited about the story; he had brought the wasps' nest to school, and it was sitting on the desk in front of him while he wrote. I was excited, too, because this was one of the rare times Phillip had been willing to write about a personal experience.

When he read the piece to me, however, it was very vague and rather "flat," communicating none of the excitement he had clearly felt about the adventure. I couldn't say this without crushing his enthusiasm, but I hoped he would read the story to the class, because they would be sure to point out the lack of drama in the piece, but without hurting him in the way a teacher's comments might.

Fortunately, this is exactly what happened. Phillip did volunteer to read that day, and the class, remembering how interested they had been when Phillip first *told* the story, was clearly disappointed with the written version. They couldn't tell him why, but their very lack of comments made the point clear.

Phillip said to me, "I think I'll write this over."

The second version was in some ways more complete, but it also omitted several concrete details that had been a strength in the first draft. I mentioned this to him. "Yeah," he said, shaking his head. "I better do this over again."

"You mean do the whole thing over?"

He shook his head. "No, I mean . . ." He frowned, trying to find the words to explain his plan. "See, I want to take part of this one —" he pointed to the first draft — "and put it together with part of *this* one —" the second draft — "and let that be my story." He looked at me sympathetically. "Do you understand what I mean?"

I certainly did understand. Phillip wanted to make one of the most sophisticated revisions of all: the synthesis of drafts. I was ecstatic. I wanted to clap him on the shoulder and congratulate him. I had to compose myself a moment before speaking. I assured him it was an excellent idea.

Phillip and I talked about the best parts of each draft, and then he combined them. The finished work was much better than either of the originals, and Phillip was happy with it. I was pleased with his accomplishment, both for him and because it was proof that a second-grader can make, in his own way, one of the most sophisticated decisions a writer can make.

* * *

Children like Heather and Jim and Nicole and Phillip wrote steadily all year, and it is easy to feel satisfied with their progress. But not every child in the class wrote with such enthusiasm. In fact some only began in April to write at all. Beginning in September, for seven months or so, they drew pictures at writing time, or read, or talked to their neighbors, never able to get beyond their pre-writing activities.

Jason is one of these children. I saw him roll his eyes every time I announced that the class should begin writing. He never volunteered for a conference. When I arranged one, he had virtually nothing to say. He would respond to my questions by saying "I don't know," and shrugging. Occasionally I coaxed him into describing an experience of some significance that he had just had, but when I asked him if he would write about the experience, he would only shrug and say, "Maybe."

In Jason's folder I regularly noticed lead sentences, like these:

> My fands Dog ran away
> We have bats they are not mean
> I was the Special helper
> One day sum people were haveing a bithday pathy it was my brother pate.

Somehow he could never get beyond these leads. He would write these simple statements, and then turn to reading or drawing.

Jason is a well-behaved child, and he must have felt that he owed it to me to write *something*. For a while he wrote dutifully every day:

> My Momm and Daddy are niys

For days he either copied over this exact statement, or he varied it somewhat:

> My famley is nies. I liek my Momm and Daddy
> My Brother is niesy and my sister is niesy

But the most fascinating of all his attempts, I thought, was this one:

> I am a live.

It was as though he wanted me to know that he really did have something to say, but apparently this wasn't the time.

Another clue that Jason wanted to write was the drawings that filled his folder. There were seemingly endless numbers of them, all depicting airplanes at war, or ships at war, or men at war, etc. These he worked on at writing time, after dashing off a sentence or two, and they were very intricate, telling stories through pictures. Several times I even encouraged him to write one of these stories, but he never did. Undoubtedly his picture-stories seemed too complicated for writing.

In April, at last, Jason began to write. He was the last of the reluctant writers; everyone else was writing, even his friend David, who had held out with him for so long. Perhaps Jason simply felt left out. Perhaps he hadn't been ready, for some reason, until now. At any rate, he announced to me one day that he was working on a book — two books, in fact — and he would soon be ready to read them to me.

Here is one of his books, "All about fights";

> one day wene I was going to the storye somebody ponc punched me so I ran after him but he got away so I fonde him in a bush him and me got in a fight I won so me and he were frands the END by by by by good by.

Jason had finally found a way, it seems, to write about his favorite subject, war, on a personal scale. Perhaps that was what he was trying to do all this time, as he shifted between vague hints at his personal life, and intricate pictures of war. Perhaps, he understands now that his interests and his writing can function together. Perhaps, as the end of his story suggests, he has learned something deeper.

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Six Questions Teachers Ask About Invented Spelling

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1. *What is invented spelling?*

Invented spelling is the name for children's misspellings before they know the rules adults use to spell, often before they know how to read. In some respects inventive spellers are learning to write as they learned to talk.

Inventive spellers' errors are systematic. Their judgments result from their tacit knowledge about our system of sounds, but they don't know all our conventions for written language. Like children learning to talk, they construct a series of increasingly elaborate rule systems. We can infer their rules, but children can't formulate the rules they follow. Inventive spellers' errors give us a window on their thinking.

Inventive spellers' errors don't interfere with their learning to spell correctly later. Like early attempts to walk, talk, and draw, initial attempts to spell do not produce habits to be overcome. No one worries when a child's first drawing of a person is a head propped up on two stick legs. As the errors become more sophisticated — two stick arms protruding from the head where the ears should be — no one fears this schema will become a habit though it may be repeated a hundred times. Although deficient by many measures, the drawings are not interpreted as signs of visual, cognitive, or fine motor problems. They are greeted as a display of intelligence and emerging proficiency.

2. *Why should children be permitted to be inventive spellers?*

Invented spelling is not so much an approach to writing as it is a way of removing obstacles in the path of a young writer. Here are some advantages for learners and teachers:

— *Independence.* An inventive speller doesn't have to ask for the correct spelling of every word he doesn't know.

— *Fluent and powerful writing.* Children can elaborate their stories and play on the paper without interruptions to look up correct spellings. With invented spelling, writing need not be the shortest distance between the title and "the end."

— *Efficient instruction.* By application of rules about the relationship between sound and symbol, children practice and drill themselves at a pace and a level of difficulty appropriate to their skills. No teacher has the time to motivate, diagnose, and assign the appropriate individualized materials for encoding and decoding that could match the work children do when they write.

Their greater commitment to their own work also ensures a different quality of attention than they would give to worksheets and workbooks. A beginner may struggle and reread a single sentence thirty or forty times before finishing it. To write "sun," the beginner may say, "Sun. Ssssuuunnn, ssss, ssss," and write S. Then, "Sunnnn, sunnnn, nnnn, nnnn," and he writes N, SN for sun.

— *Early control and responsibility.* Children make the system their own. As they use it for their own objectives, they also extend their knowledge of how the system itself works. Children learn to take risks. The worst outcome of an unsuccessful invention is that communication stops temporarily. But if the invention succeeds, their message will reach its audience. Real rewards await the child who writes fearlessly about a FROSHUS DOBRMN PENSR instead of a BAD DOG.

3. *Other than being "wrong" instead of right, how does invented spelling differ from standard spelling?*

First, children use the names of letters and not just the sounds we say the letters represent. Although we sometimes use this principle — "I" and "x-ray," for instance — it is the inventive speller's chief strategy. They may begin "elephant" with L, spell "why" with Y, "bee" with B, and end "thank you" with Q. Children don't know that the relationship between a sound and the letter that represents it is often arbitrary. Y seems a more logical choice to begin the word "went" than W, pronounced "double-u," so many early attempts to spell "went" look like Y, YT, or YNT.

Second, the sounds linguists call liquids — spelled with R and L — stand more often as a syllable without a vowel than other consonants. Toni, a first grader, spelled L's and R's without vowels most of the time:

ACL	ankle
BOTHRING	bothering
BUTRFLI	butterfly
YACE DODL	Yankee Doodle
MAPL	maple
OVR	over
REVR	river
SNRCLS	Santa Claus

Third, inventive spellers spell long vowels (r*a*in, b*e*et, b*i*ke, b*o*at, c*u*be) more accurately than the short vowels (*a*sk, b*e*t, t*i*ck, f*o*x, t*u*g). The long vowels, as many of us were taught and still may teach, "say their names." This fits nicely with the letter-name strategy inventive spellers discover on their own. Inventive spellers determine the spelling of a sound by the position of their lips and tongue when they say the word or sound, that is, the place of articulation in the mouth. We rely, in contrast, on sound, visual memory, or knowledge of word meanings to spell an unfamiliar word. Linguists and six-year-olds know that the E in "bet" is articulated more like the letter name A than E. Say the sounds together: "-e-"-A and "-e-"-E. Feel and hear the similarity between the short E and long A. As a result, inventive spellers spell "bet" BAT. Similarly, I in "fit" is articulated more like the letter name E than I, so inventive spellers write FET for "fit." Short O and short U are often spelled as O for the same reason. Short A (*a*sk) is also spelled with A. Here are a few examples taken from the writing of Sarah, a first grader:

short E		short I		short U	
ALVS	elves	HEZ	his	MOD	mud
DRRASSIS	dresses	MENIT	minute	ROFE	rough
NAKST	next	STEL	still	TROBLE	trouble

A fourth principle is that M's and N's before most consonants are not spelled because they are not articulated; that is, the tongue does not go to a particular place in the mouth. Instead, the M or N resonate in the nasal passages before the next consonant is articulated. Notice the position of your tongue when you pronounce the N's in "nine" and the position of your tongue when you say the N in "tent." "Nine" will be spelled NIN, but the N in "tent" will not be represented. TAT is a typical spelling for "tent." The N will not be felt. Children typically spell "friend" and "Fred" as FRAD. They do not hear the words as identical, but using their mouths to make judgments, the words feel similar.

The two keys to understanding why inventive spellers spell as they do is that they rely on the place of articulation in the mouth as well as their ears and eyes to spell. More experienced readers rely mainly on their ears, eyes, and knowledge of word meanings, and they make different kinds of spelling errors. Also, inventive spellers rely on matching the name of the alphabet letters to the sound they wish to spell.

4. *Are there stages in invented spelling?*

Two types of development are visible. First, the location of the sound spelled in a word is a clue to the child's maturity. The first step is writing apparently random strings of letters, then beginning sounds, then beginning and ending sounds, then beginning, middle, and ending sounds.

The least mature writers may write a string of apparently random letters. They may attempt to write a story, a sentence, or a phrase and record letters that represent a sound in the stream of language, but those sounds may not occur at the beginning or ending of words. Extra letters seem to be mixed in for reasons the child may not remember when he finishes writing. Matching letters with the message may be almost impossible. Sometimes there is no message. The writer intended to write letters and pretend it tells a story. The content must be committed to memory since the clues are not adequate, and often the message is lost. Some teachers believe these children are not yet ready to profit from instruction. Others believe they are. Often with adult amplification of their memories, they can invent reasonable spellings for words.

Next, most first graders can segment a sentence into words and spell the first sound and sometimes the last sound with a letter or two. Although they may not be able to use the terms "word" and "sentence" correctly in talk, their spelling indicates they have an implicit knowledge of word boundaries. Finally, children begin to attend to the sounds in the middle of words until they are spelling every sound.

A second pattern of development is the change in the child's locus of control in spelling. First, the mouth dominates, and then the ears and eyes, and finally knowledge of words. When children no longer use the place of articulation in the mouth to determine the spelling, they are no longer inventive spellers. Inventive spellers do, however, use auditory clues and their visual memories as well as their mouths to spell.

5. *Does invented spelling get better on its own?*

Yes, invented spelling improves without special instruction up to a point, and that point differs from child to child. Some children want to spell correctly and observe the spellings in printed books with an eye to their own writing. Some children are happy to use invented spelling as a convenient abbreviation for as long as they are permitted to do so. Children don't automatically and spontaneously arrive at the correct spelling of a word simply because they read.

Some teachers have found that until the end of second grade, their inventive spellers score as well as children who study lists of words for tests. But at about that time, some notice inventive spellers' scores drop in relation to the others'. This may be because spelling instruction is delayed until a conference about the content and the process of writing has taken place. Certainly, it is wise to confer about content first and mechanics last if we wish to convey to our students the value of content. However, when pressed for time, spelling and the other mechanics may be overlooked. If we want our children to spell well, we will have to attend to spelling. This does not mean a return to weekly lists of twenty spelling words with a test each Friday. It does mean more systematic attention to spelling and proofreading responsibilities on the child's part.

6. *How do you decide what spelling skills to teach an inventive speller?*

Invented spelling makes diagnosis of the child's rules for spelling possible. Spelling instruction should follow conferring about the content of the writing. Although at times you will want to teach individual words ("they" instead of THA or "there," "their," and "they're," for instance), usually you will teach principles of spelling. Look for signs that a child has begun to use a rule or principle but does not apply it consistently. Another similar approach is to ask yourself about the spelling on the page, "What does the child now know about spelling?" then, "What does he need to know next?"

A hierarchy of spelling skills is helpful:

1. string of letters
2. beginning sounds only
3. beginning and ending sounds
4. beginning, middle, and ending sounds

When your assessment of the spelling falls around step 3 or 4, you may begin to be concerned about how many letters of the alphabet the child knows. A typical pattern of learning the letters and using them may look like this:

- single consonants
- long vowels
- everything else in no special order: other vowel sounds, digraphs (sh, ch, ck, etc.), consonant blends or clusters (bl, str, sk, etc.)

Try to apply the diagnostic hierarchies to this sample of writing Mike produced in early December of first grade:

I wt DS A I B the C BC AP.

(I went downstairs and I brung the cat back up.)

This is more than 1, a string of letters. Mike has spelled the beginning and the ends of most words, but A for "and" and C for "cat" are not as complete as the others. D S may be *d*ownstair*s* or *d*own *s*tairs. Only Mike can tell you. He is the real expert on how he spells, so ask him before assuming anything.

In your diagnosis and in your talk with Mike, focus on what he knows. This is not a matter of kindness or politeness. For years teachers have been urged to look for deficiencies, and we often forget what the children *do* know is also important diagnostic information.

An instructional conversation might consist of these steps:

ACKNOWLEDGE. You might begin like this: "I see you know how to spell all the beginnings of the words." Perhaps you would read with Mike the sentence emphasizing the beginning sounds. Then, "I see you know 'the' and you heard the 'uh' in 'up,' and you spelled it with a vowel, A. And you also heard the endings of most of the words." You might read "went" emphasizing /t/, "back" emphasizing /k/, and "up" with /p/.

ASK FOR INFORMATION. Ask Mike about the S in D S, downstairs. Notice you are using the hierarchy, moving from step 2 to 3.

APPLY. Now you may ask Mike to apply the knowledge that he already has to a situation he has overlooked. First, he knows how to represent endings of some words, and he knows the sounds /t/ and /d/. He will probably be able to spell "cat" and "and" with T and D, CT instead of C for "cat" and AD instead of A for "and." Perhaps you think it is important instead to teach "and" as a correct and automatic word like "the." Teaching the ending of B, "brung," is tricky. There is no evidence that Mike knows the NG sounds. You may want to teach him that, too, or teach "brought" with /t/ instead.

PRACTICE. You may ask Mike to think of words that rhyme with "cat" and "and" to spell. This could be a small assignment, but more likely will take place beneath your direct supervision.

Two weeks later Mike brought this to his teacher:

Mi Mm Pt IP the Sdcnz Ad Shn Pt AP the Chrs Ms Tn.

(My mother put up the stockings and she put up the Christmas tree.)

Consult the writing and the hierarchy. Now Mike regularly spells the endings of words, step 3. Look at step 4 and ask whether he is regularly spelling the middles of words. If so, does he represent only single consonants? single consonants and long vowels? what else — digraphs, short vowels, consonant clusters? He does represent single consonants and some consonant clusters (ST and CHR) and digraphs (SH) although not all of them. He missed TR in "tree" unless the N is an R that he lost control over. Notice that he ended "she" with N, too. Perhaps he has forgotten E as a letter and as a sound. You must ask Mike.

Begin with the previous pattern. Acknowledge what Mike knows. Often this is helpful to you in focusing on his work. Now you need not mention the beginnings of words or even the ends, but the completeness of the middles of words. Don't fail to congratulate him on "Christmas" — CHRS MS — and the completeness of SDCNZ, "stockings." Ask for information next. Did he remember seeing "Christmas" in print or remember how to spell his friend Chris's name? Ask about N in "she" and "tree." The answers to those questions will determine the content of the rest of the conference, whether you teach E in "she" and "tree" or TR and other consonant clusters or both.

* * *

To encourage invented spelling is not to imply that spelling does not matter. The teacher's role is neither passive nor permissive. But rather than demanding perfection of beginning spellers, the teacher can build on their emerging competence. This approach also suggests to students the value of taking risks with their writing, and that attitude toward written language may be the real lasting benefit of invented spelling.

Conferences

The Writer's Chart to Discovery

by JOAN SIMMONS
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AS AMERICANS WE DON'T wait for buses; we catch them. We don't stop for red lights; we beat them. We don't start our engines; we race our motors. We don't stroll home at the end of a hard day; we dash home to take a three-mile run to unwind. We buy instant coffee, instant breakfast, instant lottery tickets. In short, we are in constant motion and always on the lookout for shortcuts. With students coming from this environment, it is difficult to convince them to take the time for prewriting, but it is essential to do so.

In the early stages of the writing workshop, the interview is a natural prewriting activity. Rather than have each student in the class introduce himself, I divide the class into pairs and allot each pair five minutes in which to gather as much information as possible about each other. Allowing just five minutes keeps the students on task and eliminates unnecessary detail. The specific questions to be used may be brainstormed by the class prior to the exercise or may be left up to individual students. Both procedures have worked equally well for me. Students should be encouraged to ask questions which will cover many aspects of their lives: "What do you like best about school?" "What are your future plans?" "Where did you grow up?" "What do you do in your spare time?" "Tell me about your family." The following exchange between two of my eighth-grade students shows how a pair interview works:

> Mary: Steve, have you lived here all your life?
> Steve: No, I have just moved here in August. Before that I lived in Idaho where my dad was a forest ranger.
> Mary: You were born in Idaho then?

Steve: Oh, no. I was born in Georgia. I have moved eight times since then. Two years ago I lived right here in Craftsbury.
Mary: Why did you leave?
Steve: My father worked here for a private school and took a two year leave of absence to work for the forest service.
Mary: Did you want to come back?
Steve: Sort of, but I am sick of moving. I hope I never see another U Haul again.
Mary: Tell me about your family.
Steve: I have one brother in grade six, two dogs and three cats. My mom teaches in the village, and I have already told you about my dad.
Mary: Do you play any sports?
Steve: Yes. Soccer. I like soccer a lot. I scored a goal in the first game.
Mary: What else do you do in your spare time?
Steve: I like to read and collect stamps. I have a collection worth about $200 now.

After the students have completed their interviews, they introduce each other to the class. Later this material can be presented in a piece of writing about the student. In addition, I collect these pieces and bind them into a book. Their first writings are published and the writers have a permanent record of their group.

The use of the material gathered in the interview does not end with the biographical sketches. During the introductions, many topics will be mentioned that will become future topics in student writing. In my classes, we keep a list of these topics as they are mentioned by writing them on the board. From the sample interview between Mary and Steve, Steve decided to write about the trials and tribulations of moving and later in the writing workshop, he wrote about his hobby of collecting stamps. Another student wrote about a forest fire he had seen and the mention of soccer triggered many variations on that topic. It is quite common for a student to find his subject in material presented in another's introduction. A bonus when using the interview technique is the rapport which begins to develop among the class members.

Another prewriting activity which lends itself well to the early days of the writing workshop is the interest inventory. The inventory is a list of topics, limited only by the teacher's imagination, on which students indicate their interests. The inventory can be administered orally with the student writing the topics on the inside cover of his or her writing folder, or the inventory can be completed and stapled to the student's writing folder. When a writer feels he has run out of ideas or reaches an impasse, he can turn to the inventory for suggestions.

When he finds a topic which interests him, his next step is to ask for a conference to discuss the topic or to brainstorm about the topic on paper. Students can be encouraged to add topics to their interest inventories throughout the year as new experiences occur. The interest inventory, like the writing folder, can accompany the student throughout his school years. I've included an inventory of topics suggested by my writing classes at the end of this article. I encourage teachers to make their own inventories reflecting their own students' interests.

The prewriting conference is a prime motivator for writing. It's only purpose is to assist the writer in finding his topic. If the student has not written previously, the conversation will be a continuation of the interview technique — getting the student to talk about himself until he discovers his subject. If the students already have a writing folder or journal, they can be asked questions about their previous writings which will lead them to a topic. I listened in on this eighth-grade conference on the third day of the writing class.

Tom: What did you do this summer, Bill?
Bill: Not much. Just helped my family. My mother had a baby.
Tom: Was it a boy or girl?
Bill: A little boy.
Tom: Is it fun having a little baby brother?
Bill: It's okay. It was more fun watching him born.
Tom: You saw him born? How did you get to do that?
Bill: My mom had him at home and I was right there through the whole thing.
Tom: Man. I went to scuba diving camp and I thought that was exciting, but you beat me there.
Bill: I'm not sure. Scuba diving camp sounds good to me. What did you do?
Tom: Learned how to dive and took scuba diving tests.
Bill: I don't know anything about scuba diving. Are you going to write about it?
Tom: I think I will. We had a hurricane and I was real scared.
Bill: Tell about that part.
Tom: You going to write about seeing that baby born?
Bill: Think anybody would be interested in that?
Tom: I know I would. All I ever saw born was a cat.
Bill: I'll think about it. Better talk to my mom about it first.

The sharing of a meaningful possession can be an exciting prewriting activity after a good rapport has been established. Because the objects tend to be of a highly personal nature, it is not a good activity for the first days of the writing class, but it is one of the most successful later on in the workshop. I ask my students to bring to class an object which is important to them. When the students have assembled, each student shows his object to the class and tells why it is valuable or important to him. Students may ask questions about the object or make comments as long as they are positive in nature. As the articles are being discussed, we point out possible topics for writing which have arisen during the sharing. In our sharing this fall, my students brought in rag dolls, a cameo pin, an all "A" report card, a sample of hair from a first haircut, and model airplanes. As Amy told of her rag doll and its near demise as it flew out of the car window on Interstate 89, students were reminded of their own Peter Rabbits and blankets stowed away at home. Grandmother's cameo inspired several pieces about older relatives, and the report card brought forth essays protesting grading, homogeneous grouping, and class distinctions.

It is important to look at previous writing as prewriting. The essay started on Leonardo da Vinci for art class can become a valuable piece on scientific development during the Middle Ages. An essay in science class on how and why leaves turn color in the fall can become a piece on the beauty of the same process. Changing audiences or point of view can recycle many a piece. Sometimes just one line will cry out for more time as in the following excerpt from one of my eighth-grade student's pieces on building a house.

> My father and brothers worked each night as soon as they returned from their jobs. Hardly stopping for supper, they would scramble up on the two-by-fours and begin pounding, sawing, and measuring. Only dark made it impossible to work, would the eight of us go into the tiny travel trailer we lived in that summer while we waited for the house to be built.

When Beth and I began our conference, the sentence about the eight living in the travel trailer leaped out at me and I was filled with questions. How did eight people manage for ten weeks in a travel trailer designed for four on a week vacation? Where did they all sleep? Where did they keep their clothes? Did they get irritable living so closely with each other? As we talked about it, she knew she had her next piece of writing.

It may be that a student will wish to recycle an entire piece, not just a line or two. In the conference below between two of my ninth graders, Ed decided to do just that:

Lori: Having trouble finding a subject?
Ed: I just can't think of anything to write about.
Lori: You wrote lots of good pieces last year.
Ed: In the 8th grade? I wrote a lot, but I don't think they were so great.
Lori: Didn't you like any of your pieces?
Ed: Sure. The ladybug story. But I have already written about that.
Lori: I remember that one. You found a ladybug in your yogurt!
Ed: All the kids liked that. That was my best.
Lori: Do you still have a copy?
Ed: At home. Why?
Lori: Why don't you bring it in and rewrite it. You know so much more about writing now.

Ed brought the piece in and decided there were several changes he could make. He ended up using the piece as the first draft of a very successful ninth-grade composition. It was so good, Ed was asked to read it at the Young Authors' Celebration.

Students like Ed misjudge the resources they can draw on when writing. But to discover these resources requires patience (on the part of student and teacher). Both must resist the urge for quick solutions. There is no instant writing — not even in America.

Interest Inventory

____snowmobiles
____snowshoeing
____downhill skiing
____crosscountry skiing
____ice skating
____roller skating
____bowling
____pool
____ping pong
____soccer
____football
____hockey
____handball
____basketball
____volleyball
____baseball
____softball
____shot put
____jumping
____running
____swimming
____tennis
____golf
____horse racing
____motorcycles
____car racing
____bikes
____construction
____storekeeping
____building
____calculators
____movie stars
____humor
____candles
____cartoons
____guns
____drawing
____chess
____world history

____wild animals
____baking
____hiking
____acting
____jokes
____stencilling
____French
____current events
____artists
____modern art
____sculpture
____hot lunch
____sewing
____macrame
____knitting
____crocheting
____embroidery
____decoupage
____painting
____poetry
____classical music
____country music
____rock music
____jazz
____ballet
____dancing
____square dancing
____dolls
____jewelry
____stained glass
____bottles
____antiques
____electricity
____stars
____astrology
____geology
____video games
____flowers

____gardening
____gymnastics
____makeup
____grammar
____computers
____TV
____writing
____leather working
____Vt. History
____forts
____skateboards
____sugaring
____insects
____boats
____radios
____karate
____Presidents
____selling
____camping
____airplanes
____newspapers
____continents
____Women's Lib
____cooking
____carpentry
____cars
____machinery
____horses
____cows
____sheep
____chickens
____dogs
____cats
____child care
____books
____U.S. History
____geography
____stamps

____coins
____plants
____trees
____religion
____quilting
____fishing
____tropical fish
____canoes
____exploring
____canning
____birds
____pinball
____woodcarving
____spelling
____math
____TV shows
____cameras
____hunting
____law
____lumbering
____cards
____trapping
____weaving
____rockets
____singing
____building models
____other nations
____jungles
____Canada
____Scouting
____4-H
____government
____puzzles
____myths and legends
____abortion
____unions
____administration
____4-day work week

____1. have an interest in
____2. have no interest in
____3. have an interest in but know little about it
____4. have an interest in and know much about it
____5. have no interest and do not want to know anything about it

Letting Children Lead the Way

by SHARRON CADIEUX
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ANDREW, A STUDENT IN MY readiness classroom, had just finished filling a pegboard with a variety of animal pegs. There didn't seem to be much thought evident in his random forms, but I tried the now familiar request: "Tell me about your work, Andrew."

"It's a herd of animals running to water," he replied in a serious tone. "It hasn't rained in a long time, and if they don't get some water pretty soon, they'll die. Animals need water. I'm glad it's not really gonna happen, though."

It worked again. A simple inquiry about a seemingly unimpressive product revealed Andrew's understanding and concerns about animals as well as the depth of his thinking in relation to his work.

Last year I would probably have missed Andrew's herd of animals searching for water — and countless other insights into children's thinking. Like most teachers, I felt the pressure to fill my students with all the information and knowledge they would need to be successful at the next level. Instructional time was precious, and I had to discipline myself to use every available moment for teaching.

This year, however, I wanted the opportunity to interact with children while they were in the process of creating and discovering rather than after their thoughts and energies had already been expended. I took the time to watch and listen as they worked with clay, blocks, and other manipulatives in the classroom learning centers. The energy and concentration that went into their play fascinated me.

I began to conduct short conferences usually beginning with "Tell me about your work." Like Andrew, some children would take over the conference once they knew I really wanted to hear what they had to say. They would give me a complete explanation of what they had done including rationale and value judgments. Others would simply reply, "It's a house" or "This is a spaceship." These children forced me to experiment with different types of questions in an effort to get them to talk to me and teach me about their work. Quickly, the "yes and no" type questions were replaced by questions that required the child to supply more information about his work and the thinking that went into it. I tried to ask questions to help the child expand his thinking: "What will you do next?" or "Why do you think that happened?" In an attempt to push a child to think about the process he was going through, I would ask "How did you do that?" or "Why did you do it this way?"

I also tried to encourage the child to evaluate his work in relation to his past efforts. Jimmy knew his current tower made from Cuisenaire Rods was sturdier than his earlier wobbly constructions. "Why is it stronger?" I coaxed. "I don't know," he shrugged. Often "I don't know" really means "I haven't thought about it yet." Sometimes simply rephrasing the question gives the child the time to think. I tried again, "Why is this building stronger than the ones you used to make?" "Because I made it this way," he responded as he began a second tower carefully demonstrating his new interlocking construction.

The open-ended questions I used in the learning centers worked so well that I decided to use the same approach at the writing table. I had conducted writing conferences in previous years, but had done most of the talking. Again, I was most concerned with teaching children what I felt they had to learn, rather than letting them teach me what they already knew and show me the discoveries they were able to make on their own.

Now I observe my students as they fill their large, unlined journals with drawings on a variety of subjects. I watch as they struggle to label their work with written messages, voicing words to themselves, isolating sounds, and trying to find the correct symbols. For some, it is enough to label various parts of the drawing with an initial consonant sound; others can deal with an entire sentence.

I sit at the writing table with a group of young writers. As Damon zooms his truck across the page, I watch. As he tells his friend about its unique features, I listen. I had wondered how to get my pre-first grade children to confer with each other about their writing — and discovered that they were already doing it.

Adam explained to David that the airplane in his drawing was looking for the dinosaur. The people were in danger and the airplane was trying to save them. David, obviously interested, asked him how the airplane would come to the rescue. "He's going to drop a bomb," Adam informed him, and added that information to his drawing in the form of a bomb falling from the airplane on its way to stop the evil dinosaur. David, in turn, adopted Sarah's more sophisticated house formation after evaluating the arguments she had presented in its favor. They were teaching each other, holding each other accountable for more information, and learning that writing is communicating with an audience.

The children responded eagerly to the interest expressed in their classmates' questions. I attempted to follow their lead. As a child sat down at the writing table, I asked what he was going to write about. In the midst of his task, I asked what he would do next. Their responses told me how well they were able to plan their activities.

I asked them to tell me about their writing. If my first request was met with "I don't know" or a brief response, I tried again. "What's happening in your picture?" is very often an opening to information about an action drawing. I have learned about the latest space adventures and the antics of the current super hero without turning on the television. The good guys chase the bad guys across pages filled with action. The child's words bring the characters to life. The child takes the lead, and I attempt to follow at the same time encouraging the child to take another step.

I hope to let my students know that I'm listening by picking up on their words and bouncing them back to them. Because I ask for more information, my students are convinced of my interest in what they have to tell me. Many children began to anticipate my questions, and they begin to explain what they've done even before I offer any encouragement. "I'll tell you about my writing," Tommy volunteered as I neared his chair. The page in front of him was filled with well ordered circles of various sizes. "It's Ian's basement. Me and Ian threw a lot of wood down there."

I never would have guessed that the mass of circles represented wood. "Wow, it certainly does look like you threw a lot of wood down there," I agreed using his words. "How did you do that?" The explanation that followed confirmed the thinking that had gone into his work but that was not evident in his drawing.

At the writing table, as in the other learning centers, I want the children to think about their work, to make judgments and inferences, and to discover missing or unnecessary information. If a child tells me he's made a car or a rocket, I ask where it's going or where he's been. If he draws about something he obviously likes, I ask why he likes it or what he likes most. Some stories lend themselves to questions about what is most important or special. Other episodes are appropriate for discussions about the child's feelings in relation to a real life event or experience. Sometimes pointing to a part of the drawing that the child hadn't mentioned will elicit information he assumed could be read from his drawing.

If given the opportunity, children will also tell us the skills they are ready to learn. Keith has taught me more about snakes than I ever thought I wanted to know. Through his enthusiasm, this serious child has shown me the key to teaching him about sentence order. Keith is beyond simply labeling his drawing. He wants to write his message down on paper for others to read. "COBRA," correctly spelled, is surrounded by a cluster of letters he struggles to interpret. He is unsuccessful because the order and extra words don't make any sense. If my instruction follows his lead, his compelling interest in snakes will take him one step at a time toward conventional spelling and sentence structure.

Tommy wrote "LIK" for "like." As I copied his message in small letters at the bottom of the page, he noticed the "e." "I didn't hear that!" he challenged. Could there possibly be a better time to explain the existence of silent letters?

By allowing children to show us when instruction will be most effective, less time is wasted presenting material to a group at a time when it might be inappropriate or unimportant for particular children. My students are acquiring the skills expected of them at least as quickly as they would in any traditional prereading program. But, by creating their own stories, these young children are also growing in more advanced levels of critical thinking and creativity. In conferences with me and each other, they analyze their stories, make a wide range of decisions and evaluations, add missing information and even cross out things that are not needed.

When we let children take the lead, they will carry us past myriads of houses, each one unique, on every kind of vehicle imaginable. They will introduce us to dogs, cats, friendly cobras, and herds of animals in search of water. In daring confrontations filled with energy, they will lead us on to exciting triumphs over bad guys, sentence structure, and conventional spelling.

Squeezing from the Middle of the Tube

by SUSAN B. BRIDGE
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WHILE THERE ARE MANY articles that describe writing conferences with children, the drawing in the child's work is often regarded as a poor cousin. The drawing is often portrayed as little more than a crutch to help the student think of a topic — to be discarded once the *writing* process takes hold. The drawing is something to be outgrown.

Such a view not only ignores the many ways drawing can aid writing; it also ignores the thinking and problem-solving that occur when a child draws. Both drawing and writing require the child to deal with fundamental concerns of composing — planning, depicting emotions, expanding an idea, focusing. The conference which centers on the drawing can foster these composing skills in students who find writing and reading too difficult to attempt. Their success in drawing will then lay the groundwork for subsequent achievement with written language. The justification for the drawing conference does not, however, rest solely on its contribution to writing development. Drawing and the drawing conference are justified in their own right. *Drawing is thinking* and deserves more than the frill status often given it.

I will describe four types of conferences: Process, Affective, Focusing, and Expansion. I have separated them to suggest the variety of types of thinking that the drawing conference can foster. In actual practice there is considerable overlap.

Process Conference

The purpose of the process conference is to help the child become aware of his strategies of learning by asking what he did, where he is now, and what he plans to do next. It may be the most frequent type of conference held with young children.

Jimmy, nine years old and a non-reader, brings his drawing (Figure 1) to the conference table.

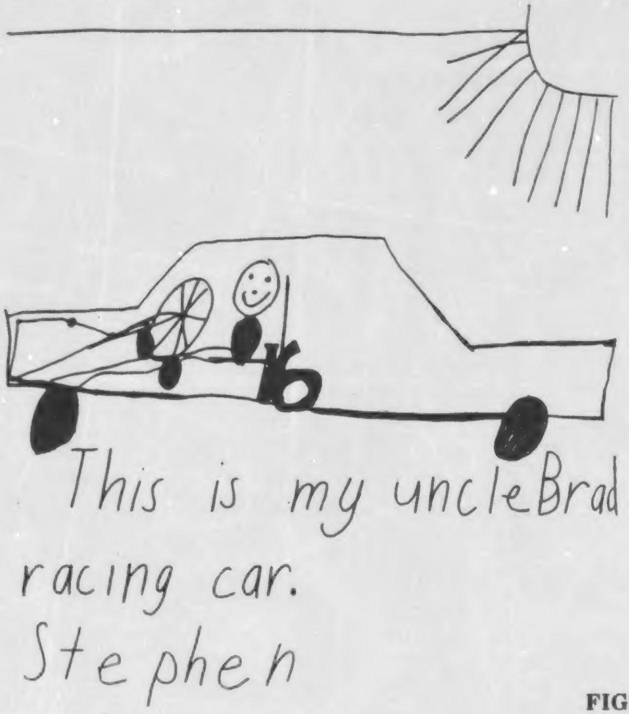


FIGURE 1

Teacher: Jimmy, I know you have worked hard on this picture. Can you tell me about it?

Jimmy: This is my Uncle Brad. He's in his racing car.

Teacher: What made you draw a picture about Uncle Brad and his race car?

Jimmy: Well, I watched him Saturday. We went, my whole family and me, and there was a crash-up and everything. Uncle Brad got second in the race.

Teacher: You must be very proud of your uncle. How do you feel about your picture right now? Is there anything you want to add about your uncle?

Jimmy: Nope.
Teacher: You're finished? What do you plan to do next?
Jimmy: On this page (turns to next page in booklet), I am going to make Uncle Brad's car with a number fourteen on the side. 'Cause they changed his number, and now it's fourteen.

Jimmy will not want to change or add anything to his drawing for some time yet. He is perfectly satisfied with his work and, until the drawing no longer meets his standards, he will continue in the same pattern. My job is to ask "What" and "Why" questions. When he is ready, the change will come.

A process conference that asks about the past, present, and future of the child's work is a good way to touch base with a class full of children. In just a minute you can help the child reflect on his work and decide on a direction.

Affective Conference — Two Types

1. The simple, straightforward affective conference helps the child to make the picture look happy or sad. Children's early drawings are often static. They do not show action or reflect feelings. Like Egyptian paintings, they seem flattened and in suspended animation. This will usually take care of itself through experimentation, but there are questions that may help put some life into the piece. For example: "Just how excited *were* you when you got off the plane? Show me how your face looked. What about your arms? Were you waving, carrying heavy bags, holding on to your dad? How do you suppose you could show that on your paper?"

Encourage them to act out their feelings, then to show the feelings in their pictures. Talking about it, making a picture in one's mind and then on paper, will often trigger more descriptive writing. My job in this conference, then, is to help the child re-live the experience so that he can draw and write with more life.

2. The second type of affective conference is more complex and can be frustrating for the teacher. It involves a child who has feelings that can't be verbalized and become an obstacle to the child, often resulting in little or no writing.

In this case, Jeff could write little more than his name at the beginning of the year. The rest of the writing time he spent making drawings of black boats, stormy seas, flying bullets, and ships that sank in dark, threatening seas. Jeff was expressing how he felt. To say or write those thoughts would be too incriminating, but there is a certain safety in drawing. Jeff drew to sort out his feelings.

Many booklets and weeks were filled before Jeff would even talk with me about Puff, the boat that was always in trouble in his pictures. Each conference seemed a failure to me. Each question appeared to be a dead-end question — no response, negative response, monosyllable response. I felt frustrated, Jeff felt frustrated. I continued to ask questions. I waited.

More than two months went by before there was writing to accompany the pictures. One day in early November, he wrote, "POF IS A BOT. HE IS TA SEA. THER IS A STOEM TA SEA." (Fig. 2) It was January before Jeff appeared in his writing as himself. Two weeks of struggle and tears produced a piece about his dogs.

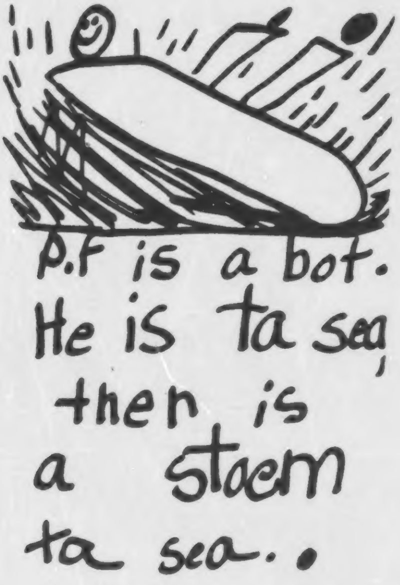


FIGURE 2

> MY DOGS NAME ARE BELL AND FREGLIG. I UEST TO HAVE TWO DOG. BUT (My dogs' names are Bell and Franklin. I used to have two dogs. But) WUN DAY I OEFV MY DOGS RAN A WAWE. I AM SAD BE COS I OFV MY DOGS. (one day one of my dogs ran away. I am sad because I love my dogs.)

Then, in February, Jeff wrote "My Family Fishes." "I GOT MY FISH ON THE MIDL OF SOMRE I WAS HAPPY." (I got my fish in the middle of summer. I was happy.) The story goes on to tell how the fish died one by one until there were only two fish left. When I asked him how he felt about this, if he missed the fish, he decided to write at the end of the piece: "I TROBL MY MOM FOR TWO MORE FISH."

In talking with Jeff at the beginning of the year, I would question him about the pictures. "How did Puff feel in the storm?" "What would happen if. . . .?" We would talk about how Puff looked in the picture, how he could make Puff look as sad as Jeff described — comparing what was in the picture with what Jeff was saying.

As he began to discover words that expressed what the picture dealt with, he was able to draw more expressively and eventually write about issues that troubled him.

Focusing Conference

There is much information for the young writer to organize before manageable units of meaning become clear enough to write about. It is difficult to narrow a topic. Many children who say they have nothing to write about may in fact be saying, "There is so much information I cannot find a place to begin."

Joshua, like Jimmy, is nine and cannot read. The fact that he is unable to attach meaning to print places him in a situation so overwhelming that he no longer expresses interest in learning to read and write. During writing time he is restless; he spins his pencil on the desk and stares at other writers in the room. Joshua can tell long, involved stories about his life, but hesitates to put anything on paper.

Since drawing has the ability to make children's ideas concrete and perceivable, I decided to try and help Joshua find one thing that he cared enough about to take a chance on paper. I encouraged him to draw. Vague at first, his drawings became more detailed over time, and he began to experiment with letters. His topic? Fishing. Here Joshua has made a detailed picture of a boat. (Fig. 3)

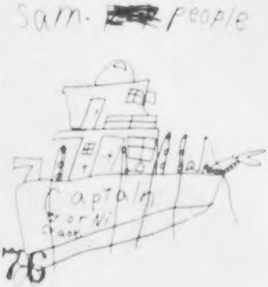


FIGURE 3

T: This looks exciting, Joshua. Can you tell me about your picture?
J: It's about fishing.
T: Fishing! Are you and your family fishing?
J: Na, just me and my dad went. These (pointing to the other rods) are just other people on the party boat. We went Sunday.
T: Do you like to fish?
J: Yaah, it's fun. 'Specially on a party boat.
T: Tell me about party boats! I don't know anything about them.
J: That's when a lot of people pay money to go on a boat to fish in the ocean. We have loads of fun, but when girls come they can get sick. (Laughs) They come around asking for saltines and ginger-ale.
T: So you have fun, and sometimes girls get sick. Who do you show on this boat? Are you in this picture?
J: Yup. I'm the one wearing the red shirt. (Pauses) Oops! I haven't done that part yet.
T: What are you planning to do next in your piece, Joshua?
J: I'm going to show me better by coloring my shirt red. Then I'm going to show what kind of fish I caught.

By focusing on one aspect of his drawing, himself, Joshua was able to identify a direction to take in his piece. Joshua is on the way to writing through drawing.

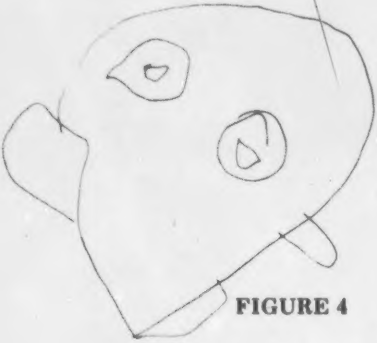
Expansion Conference

We have all had a student who writes one sentence and says, "Finished!" or whose stick figure is the completed drawing. The intent of the expansion conference is to help the child expand on his topic — verbally, pictorially, and in writing.

Expansion questions help the child to be a better observer of the world around him. Questions about the content of the drawing may make the child conscious of an audience and the details that help a reader understand the piece. You may feel that your attempts at questioning have fallen on deaf ears, because they may go unanswered and unacted upon for some time. Children may seem surprised that you didn't know the information yourself — after all, *you* are the grown-up!

Over a period of time they will begin to expect these questions from you and begin to ask themselves similar ones. And they will be able to add to their pictures. Internalization of expansion questions is evident when a child comes to you and says: "And don't ask me about the rest of the shirt. You can't see it because of the long hair!"

Kevin, although only three years old, shows an understanding that adding may make his pieces better. In his typical whirlwind fashion, he produces drawings quickly and decisively. On the table is a piece of paper that changed in one minute from a car to a camel, and then to a mask — a discovery draft! (Fig. 4) The second drawing begins as another mask. (Fig. 5)



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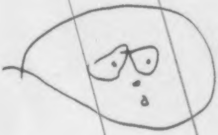

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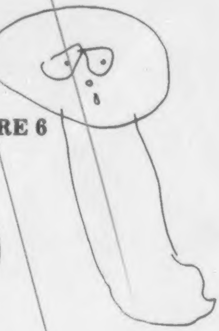

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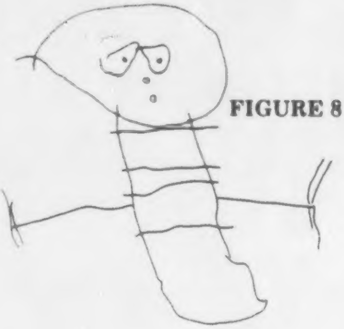

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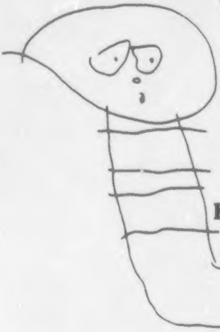

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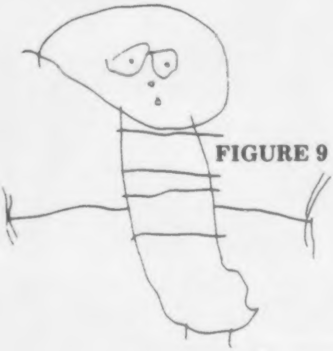

FIGURE 9

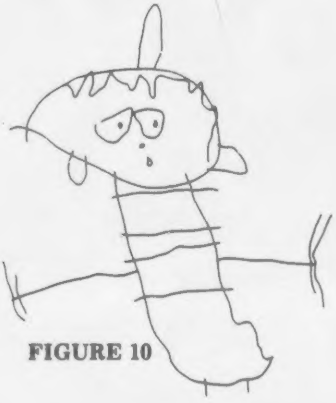

FIGURE 10

K: (Drawing, begins to laugh.) It's a funny face. It's MY face! (Quickly he draws a tadpole body, revising the mask.) (Fig. 6)

K: That's me! (Pointing to the picture.) That's my shirt! (Pointing to the body he has drawn. He looks down at his own shirt, touches the fabric.) I have stripes on it. (Makes stripes on the shirt [Fig. 7], pats stripes he has just made and says:) That's part of him.

K: (Without hesitation he draws the arms, adding four fingers to each.) (Fig. 8) I don't know where the feet are. There's no room. (Directed towards me — he had drawn the figure close to the bottom of the page.)

T: What do you think you could do if there's no more room?

K: Put it down here. (Draws two straight lines from the tadpole body to the end of the paper.) Feet! (At this point Kevin appears to be finished.) (Fig. 9)

T: Tell me about your drawing.

K: It's me!

T: It *is* you! I see your face, and your arms — here are your fingers, and your shirt with stripes on it, and your feet. It certainly looks like you. Is there anything else you want to add to make it look just like Kevin?

K: (Looks at his picture, puts his hand up and touches his ears.) Ears. (Draws ears.)
(Puts hand on the top of his head.) Point. (Draws a point on top of the head, making a quick motion.)
(Touches his head again.) Hair. (Draws hair carefully. Looks at picture, appearing satisfied.) (Fig. 10)

In less than five minutes, Kevin had brainstormed a topic, had revised his drawing several times by adding details. He has worked hard, is happy with the product, and is definitely FINISHED. Sliding off the chair, he's gone.

* * *

Long before mastering sound-symbol correspondences, children are making pictures. Because they begin to document in picture form, it is important to allow children in the primary grades to continue visual expression alongside writing. We need to take the time to read the writing of drawing.

Kevin found ways to expand on his topic. Joshua and Jimmy began to see connections between drawing and writing. Children with speech problems and learning disabilities and children with problems similar to Jeff's may be more able to write when allowed to work through picture-making.

Sometimes I think that writing teachers who only consider the writing part of the child's story are like people who squeeze from the middle of the toothpaste tube. They only get part of what's in there.

Reflect, Expand, Select: Three Responses in the Writing Conference

by SUSAN SOWERS
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Cambridge, Massachusetts

THERE IS A MYSTIQUE surrounding questions teachers ought to ask students in a writing conference. We sometimes forget a good conference is a workmanlike conversation about writing in progress — not an interrogation. We rehearse provocative questions when we ought to listen to the writer or to the writing. We are poised, ready to engineer a breakthrough in revision with the right question.

Our vigilance is commendable. But faith in the power of the right question is misplaced. There are no magic questions. We should cultivate watchfulness and trust in the child's slowly accumulating knowledge of writing. Donald Murray has written, "I have developed a repertoire of questions — what surprised you? what's working best? what are you going to do next? — but I rarely use them. . . . The student comes to get my response to the work, and I give my response to the student's response." (p. 144)

The conferences and pieces of children's writing that follow are drawn from data collected at Atkinson Academy, the public school for Atkinson, New Hampshire. They illustrate an alternative to over-reliance on questions as a bag of tricks. The three kinds of responses to the content of writing — reflect, expand, and select — do not guarantee that children will see their writing through our eyes, but they may help us see children's writing through the child's eyes.

Reflect

When a teacher reflects on a child's writing, she mirrors the text. She may summarize, paraphrase, or restate. Writing is unfinished until the message is savored. The cycle of craft is incomplete without viewing and reviewing, comparing the product to the plan or the experience that launched it.

Reflection gives the writer distance. In high school, I painted a series of murals, and my father let me borrow from the printing plant where he worked a reducing lens. The opposite of a magnifying glass, a reducing lens gives printers immediate distance from their illustrations and sharpens the image and colors. It saves steps across a large room. I saw the whole and the relationships between the parts of my murals with greater clarity through the reducing lens.

Many children can sense the results of distance. A seven-year-old told me about climbing a hill. "The cars looked like toy cars and the people looked like ants," he said. Stepping back need not mean only loss of information; it can bring into focus previously unseen patterns. Just as a child discovers his picture looks different displayed on the wall than it did on the table where he made it, he may hear his writing differently in a summary, paraphrase, or retelling.

A second kind of reflecting goes on in a writing conference. Not only does the teacher reflect what is in the writing, but she also encourages the student to reflect on the experience itself — to talk about the experience itself. So the writer can achieve a double kind of distance — distance on the text and distance on the experience depicted in the text. With the young writer the experience reflected in talk will be much fuller than the text reflected back to the student. Initially this discrepancy will not bother the student, and it will rarely push the student to revise. Eventually, though, the student senses a tension between reflected experience and reflected text. There is an incompleteness, an invitation to elaborate. The groundwork for expansion is laid.

Danny, a first-grade writer, read his published book and displayed the illustrations to his classmates. He had written a draft, had a conference with his teacher, and then made changes and corrections in the text. In a later conference he had selected this book over four others he'd written to be typed and bound in a hard cover — a published book.

> **Jeffrey Came to My House**
>
> One day Jeffrey came over my house. He stayed overnight.
> The next day we played on the tire swing. I got there first.
> Jeffrey pushed me. When it came back, it hit Jeffrey's nose.
> He was crying.
> My mom took care of him, and we went back on the tire swing.
> When my dad come home, we ate supper.
> We watched television.
> Then we took Jeffrey home.
>
> About the author: Danny's birthday is March 15. He will be eight years old. This story really happened.

After Danny read, Alex and John admired the colorful wallpaper cover he had chosen. Vicky noticed how round he drew the tire swing. Ellen asked why he drew only one eye and one arm on the figure, and Danny explained one side was all you could see. It was a profile.

Mary Ellen Giacobbe, their teacher, might have been a bit disappointed. Her first graders usually discussed content with a reader's curiosity and delighted in another child's writing, but not today.

"I liked your *story*," she said, " — when you went to the tire swing, and Jeffrey got hit, and your mom took care of him, but he went back. Then you watched t.v., and he went home. I didn't know that Jeffrey came to your house to play." Mrs. Giacobbe did not reprimand the children for their attention to the information in Danny's skillful drawings. Instead, she modeled a response that let them know she valued the content of Danny's writing. She reflected the story when she paraphrased it. She acknowledged what Danny knew.

Teachers mirror the writing when they tell the author what surprised them or how the incidents in the piece made them feel. They recognize the child's knowledge and respond to the news.

Judith Egan, a second-grade teacher, also responded to content in one-to-one conferences before she addressed mechanical problems of spelling and punctuation. This conference was Mrs. Egan's first response to Katy's piece. The effects of earlier conferences are visible in the content of the piece and in the dialogue between writer and teacher.

> Katy (reading): "The first thing we done in Boston, we went to The Children's Museum in Boston. This museum is really big. We got to go in it."
>
> (to Mrs. Egan) Happy, I was happy.

(Katy anticipates a question about how she felt, and she answers it.)

(reading) "They had a McDonald's next to The Children's Museum."

(to Mrs. Egan) Hitched on to it.

Mrs. Egan: Really? Hmm.

(Mrs. Egan responds as a curious listener.)

Katy (reading): "We saw a lot of things like how the Indians lived, how the handicapped people lived, and all different things in life."

Mrs. Egan: What a good word — handicapped. What does that mean?

Katy: When people are crippled or they ride in wheel carriages or they have a broken leg.

Mrs. Egan: Is that the display where you can ride in a wheel chair and see what it's like to be handicapped? I think there were games that let you know what it would be like if you didn't see or hear correctly. I heard that's a really good exhibit, Katy.

(Mrs. Egan shares her enthusiasm for an exhibit she knows without taking the conference away from Katy. The next exhibit is about a children's author the class has studied.)

Katy: I like the next one.

(reading): "I came to the doll houses and I saw one of the houses. And I said, 'That looks like Beatrix Potter's doll house,' and it was. I was so happy I hollered, 'Mom! Mom! Look at that! This is Beatrix Potter's doll house!'

"She said, 'It must be because it has a story about the two bad mice.'

"I said, 'That is the house that was in the story.

"And then she read the story to me. When she got to the part when she said the doll house, they were both the same color and they looked the same."

Mrs. Egan: Which looked the same, Katy?

Katy: The book and . . . they both looked the same.

Mrs. Egan: The picture and the doll house itself?

Katy (reading): "Then we got to the computers and we played hangman, tic tac toe, and inchworm. I had a lot of problems."

Mrs. Egan: Using the computer?

(She encourages Katy to elaborate.)

Katy: I pushed the wrong button.

Mrs. Egan: I remember when we had the computers at the children's museum in Nashua. I had a hard time with them, too.

(Again, she makes a conversational response about a shared experience.)

Katy: My father works with them some days at his work.

(reading) "And we got to play in a Volkswagon. We saw how the gears work."

(pointing to her illustration) That's the stick thing, the shift. That's the emergency brake. The gas, the brake, the wheel, and the clutch.

(reading) "I got to go down a manhole. All it was was wire and pipes, and then we went to the little store in The Children's Museum. And I got a little car and a book by Beatrix Potter."

Mrs. Egan: What was the book that you got?

Katy: *Squirrel Nutkin*. Says in the back.

(reading) "Then we left the museum. We went to the No Name Diner. And I had chowder."

Mrs. Egan: Had you ever been to the No Name Diner before?

Katy: My first time.

Mrs. Egan: I've been there before. They have super chowder.

Katy: I had fish chowder. It had mostly meat.

Mrs. Egan: Did it? Do you know that their chowder is famous and that the people from the No Name Diner have actually served it at the White House? To the President?

Katy: My grandfather told me that. 'Cause he goes in there all the time. In Boston.

(Mrs. Egan has been responding to the content of Katy's writing, her news. Now she attends to Katy's process and her progress over the year.)

Katy: I went on some other trips. I half forget about them.

Mrs. Egan: You know what I notice in this book? Your book about your trip to Pennsylvania with your family — remember how you really had to work on the order and getting the order of everything? (Katy laughs.) Something I notice in this book you *have* done . . .

Katy: . . . put it all in order!

Mrs. Egan: I see everything in the beginning of the book is about the trip to The Children's Museum, . . .

Katy: . . . then McDonald's, then handicapped and all about Beatrix Potter's doll house, the computer, the Volkswagon, the manhole, then at the No Name Diner.

Mrs. Egan: You have everything about the museum together, everything about eating together. I also like the way you wrote this at home over vacation, Katy. It's kind of nice to have a book right there when everything's fresh in your mind.

(Mrs. Egan recognizes Katy's growth, and Katy is justifiably proud.)

Mrs. Egan: I also notice, Katy, that you remembered to use periods throughout the book, and it's nice to see that.

Katy: I didn't even look in my folder. 'Cause I looked in it, and I done it all.

(Katy's personal list of proofreading responsibilities is inside the folder where she keeps drafts before choosing one to publish.)

Mrs. Egan: You remember what you now know how to do? That's good, Katy.

Katy: Yeah.

Mrs. Egan: Katy, I'd like you to look at the word "said."

Katy: Said. S, A . . . D.

Mrs. Egan: Those are three of the letters in "said." You are very, very close. What I'd like you to do right now is draw a line under "said" every time you see it on that page. You are very close in the spelling of "said." S-A-D all by themselves spell "sad" instead of "said." We need to add another vowel, Katy, right after the A.

Katy corrected her spelling of "said" and laughed at "SAD." Then she noticed forgotten quotation marks and added them without a reminder. Mrs. Egan affirmed Katy's knowledge of written English and took her one step closer to automatic correctness.

Mrs. Egan concluded the conference by asking Katy to go to the table where the other children were writing and reread her piece. "If you see anything else you'd like to change or add, fine. If you want to read it to someone else, maybe you can get some more ideas," she said.

Mrs. Egan and Mrs. Giacobbe did not demand revision. Mrs. Giacobbe summarized Danny's story in less than half a minute. Mrs. Egan responded to Katy's news as she read in under four minutes, and they discussed her growth as a writer in just over one minute. Mrs. Egan began the sentence, "Something I notice in this book you *have* done . . ." and Katy finished the sentence for her, ". . . put it all in order!" Mrs. Egan began to enumerate the parts she had organized, and again Katy took over the list, a summary of her own piece. Mrs. Egan responded to Katy's news as she read it in under four minutes, and evoked in her — difficulty with a computer and enthusiasm for the No Name Diner and the exhibit on the handicapped. Katy knew from previous conferences that she would not be pressured to revise, so she offered more information ("My grandfather told me that. 'Cause he goes in there all the time.") or alerted Mrs. Egan that she was ready to move on ("I like the next one.").

The psychologist L.S. Vygotsky (1978) has defined a "zone of proximal development" where the child can perform mental tasks *in collaboration* with others. He writes, ". . . what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow — that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow." (p. 87) When students join teachers in a reflective stance toward their writing, students are more likely to practice reflection on their own.

Expand

Some children revise their writing independent of their teachers, just as they might add a cupola to a block tower or gills to a drawing of a shark to make their representations complete with a salient realistic detail. A writing conference in which a teacher helps a writer expand on a draft often begins with reflection. The writer may volunteer details which become part of the draft.

First grader Toni brought her book to Mrs. Giacobbe and read it aloud:

> All About My Dream
>
> I had a dream.
> It was a monster that was going to kill me.
> I had to go through a lot of grass.
> I went on a cliff.
> I was in the water.
> I was still in the water.

First Mrs. Giacobbe paraphrased the writing. "You had a dream that a monster was chasing you. It chased you through some grass, and then you jumped off a cliff into some water. But did the monster get you? I need to know what happened," she demanded.

"I didn't want to get out of the water because the monster doesn't like water," Toni explained. She had no difficulty replying to Mrs. Giacobbe's demands because it was a part of her own experience and a subject she chose.

"Where could you put that?" Mrs. Giacobbe asked. She helped Toni attend to the revision by dividing the problem in two parts — first, what to say and second, where to add it.

"Right here," said Toni, pointing to the space above the drawing of herself safe in the water. Toni made her revision and read, " 'I was safe in the water. The monster doesn't like water.' " Then she volunteered, "He doesn't like water because he's half cat."

"He's half cat? How would I know that?" Mrs. Giacobbe nudged Toni again. "You better tell it to me. Boy, Toni, you keep telling me more stuff!"

Toni added the newest information, this time finding space on the page without assistance, and read again. " 'I was still in the water. I was safe in the water. The monster doesn't like water because the monster is half cat.' Oops, I forgot a period." She added her only period on the page at the end of the last sentence.

"I feel much better now," Mrs. Giacobbe said. "Now I know you turned out safe. When you wrote that the first time, I had no idea."

Mrs. Giacobbe helped Toni expand and complete her piece by dramatizing a reader left in suspense over the fate of the heroine.

In the following small group writing conference in Mrs. Egan's class, other children help Sean to expand his piece, "My Vacation." Early in second grade, his writing process, like Toni's, was guided by first drawing, then writing about the drawing. Every page with two or three sentences was the result of an addition in a previous individual conference with Mrs. Egan. Sean has chosen to publish this book, that is, to make it his best before it is typed and bound. The explicit purpose of this conference is to help Sean write as complete a version of his story as he can. Sean read:

> We are going on vacation. It takes two days to get there. We are going to Nova Scotia.
> We are on vacation. We are going to get unpacked. After, we are going swimming.
> We are swimming.
> We are riding in a boat.
> We are getting some gas.
> We saw an eagle's nest.
> We went on a ferry. It carries cars.
>
> Debbie: I have lots of questions. Where did you see the eagle's nest? On the ground? Up in a tree?
>
> Jill: Well, he was showing them climbing a mountain. (She refers to Sean's drawing.)
>
> Mrs. Egan: Well, what does it look like?
>
> Jill: Well, they look like they're climbing up.
>
> Mrs. Egan: Sean, what did happen when you saw the eagle's nest?
>
> Sean: First we saw a fox and about ten feet higher we saw the eagle's nest.

Mrs. Egan: You were climbing up with your family?

Sean: No.

Mrs. Egan: Who were you with?

Sean: My dad.

Debbie: What mountain?

Sean: Kelly Mountain.

Debbie: What did you see?

Sean: There was a baby eagle in the nest.

Mrs. Egan: A baby eagle! Not many people get to see an eagle's nest with a baby eagle in it!

Sean: And we saw a baby deer.

Mrs. Egan: Sean, you had a lot of exciting things happen.

Jill: I have a question. Where did you swim? At the beach?

Debbie: At the lake?

Sean: No, the ocean.

Debbie: I thought it was the lake because of that walkway. (She saw his illustration.)

Sean: It was the ocean. There are baby whales out there.

Mrs. Egan: Baby whales! Now you have two pages to work on after the conference. Which ones will you work on?

Sean: The eagles and swimming.

Of the eight questions about Sean's content, Debbie and Jill asked five and Mrs. Egan asked three. However, only Mrs. Egan made reflective comments: "Sean, you had a lot of exciting things happen," "Baby whales! Now you have two pages to work on after the conference," and "Not many people get to see an eagle's nest with a baby eagle in it!" Expanding conferences seem to be built on reflection.

Not all of Sean's newly revealed information was an answer to his questioners. He recalled the fox, the baby deer, and the baby whales in the ocean while answering other questions. Those details may be of more value to him than the details intended to fill the readers' gaps in understanding. Expansion is more than a remedy for the accidental omissions of an ego-centric writer. The poet Josephine Jacobsen said of her revision process, "What happens in revision is that knowledge that you had all along, when you were writing the poem, and which simply hasn't been implemented — hasn't found its way into the poem — is restored." Sean seemed to have recovered a theme of baby animals from his vacation, although it did not appear in his final draft.

As children take responsibility for eliciting information from another writer, they learn to ask themselves similar questions. Hilary, one of Mrs. Egan's students, explained that she goes over her writing again and again. She explained that she asks herself questions the other children might ask, for example, " 'Why does Blackie have a ring through his nose?' " Her answers to her imagined questioners helped her develop and expand her text. " 'So he will go where we want him to go,' " she might explain about her bull. Hilary called this process having "an individual conference with myself."

Select

As children grow more fluent in writing, they are ready to learn to focus. Hilary hesitated to write about her doll collection because she thought she would have to write about every doll to do a good job. For her, writing well meant being thorough. Egan (1981) discovered her reluctance in a conference and suggested she could write a better book by choosing a few of her favorites. Hilary was learning to select.

A popular form of writing among six, seven, and eight-year-old writers is the bed-to-bed story beginning, "We woke up . . ." and ending, "We went to bed." Closure is so important that children often write "The End" in large letters at the back of a book before they know their ending or their middle. Just as classical dramatists compressed all the action of a play into a twenty-four hour day, children like their writing to encompass a whole waking day. Katy was experienced enough to avoid this temptation and described only the museum and restaurant. Still, Mrs. Egan did not suggest she write a second draft eliminating all the museum exhibits but one favorite because Katy might not have been ready to exclude that much information.

Brian, famous as a story teller in Janet Dresser's third grade, did not attempt to write about everything his visit to relatives in Ireland included. His first draft of one piece about his journey was 203 words long with 20 sentences. He described waiting at the airport in ten sentences (e.g., "I saw French people, American people, Irish people, and all that kinds of stuff!"), riding on the first plane in four (e.g., "When we were up in the air, I asked, 'Can I have some Coke?' "), changing planes in one ("When we got our turn to board the plane, I found out I had to share a seat with a man!"), a fellow passenger in two ("It was fun even if he was breaking the law! You see, he brang wine with him!"), and concluding remarks in three (e.g., "We said, 'Good-bye!' ").

After conferring with his peers and Mrs. Dresser, Brian eliminated all but the first scene, waiting in the airport. As a result of this decision, he cut 15 sentences and kept only five:

- lead — " 'I've been waiting here so long I have to go to the bathroom!' I said in a soft voice."
- first announcement — "A lady came to the front. 'The plane has motor trouble. You will have to wait.' "
- second announcement — "Then the lady came up again and said, 'There will be no supper on the plane!' "

In selecting and focusing, Brian expanded his draft from 203 words to 322. In the first draft, only two sentences came between the lead and the first announcement; in the second draft, 28 sentences. It may seem counterintuitive that a child who deleted actually expanded his piece by 59%. But Brian followed his own rules for writing, not someone else's instructions. His conference partners served mainly to remind him of what he knew.

Here is the beginning of his second draft:

> "I've been waiting here so long that I have to go to the bathroom," I said in a low voice. I was walking to the bathroom. I saw two other groups. I turned. I stopped and looked. I saw a man with a gun to the right. Then I saw a door. It had a sign that said men. I walked in with my back-sack. I pretended when I came out of the bathroom that that was the bag of money.
>
> I walked down the hall. I took a left. Now there's only one group left. I walked the rest of the way with my hands up.
>
> I kept walking. When I got to my seat, I took out my football computer. I pretended that it was the bomb. The people that sat next to me started saying to themself, "What is that?"
>
> One of them said out loud, "It's one of those electronic things."
>
> I looked at them and smiled. "No," I said, "it is a bomb."

Then, he wrote, embarrassed by the attention, he went to look out the window. After the two announcements, Brian reported a conversation between his parents about supper and finally he ate a hamburger in the airport restaurant where he watched a man demonstrate toy airplanes, up around, down around.

In Brian's second conference, his peers questioned him in detail, seeking clarification: where were you? what do you mean — "a man with a gun"? what two groups? where did the back-sack come from — the bathroom? Brian answered, relishing the story. Then Mrs. Dresser intervened. "Did you like it?" she asked them. Yes, they replied with enthusiasm, they liked the lead, the action, the excitement, the humor, the details. Ben added, recalling Brian's first draft, "It's not all over the place, *in* the airport, *on* the airplane." The children knew focus was a criterion for good writing. Then Mrs. Dresser asked Brian for his evaluation. With a gesture of his hand, he rated it as fair. "I went a little over," he confessed. He was sorry he included pretending the football computer was a bomb. He hadn't pretended that. But he defended the imaginary bank robbery because that he *had* pretended.

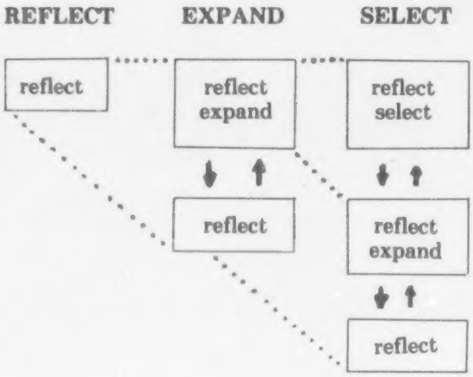
After the second conference, Brian revised again. With scrupulous care to make it true, he deleted the bomb episode. He also deleted a dull conversation about supper. Although he wrote 322 words in the second draft and 324 in the third, he consolidated much of the second draft, from 48 to 34 sentences. His beginning, with additions and substitutions in italic, then read:

> "I've been waiting *at this airport* so long that I have to go to the bathroom," I said in a low voice. *I put my back-sack on and got up for the bathroom.*
>
> I saw two other groups *of people*. There was a *policeman* with a gun *in one of the groups, so I pretended I was a robber. I took a right.* Then I came to a door. It said men. I went in. When I came *back* out *with my back-sack in my hand*, I pretended that that was a bag of money.
>
> I turned a left. There was only one group *and the policeman was gone, so I stopped playing.*
>
> When I got to my seat, I took out my football computer. The people that sat next to me started saying to themself, "What is that?"
>
> One of them said, "It's one of those electronic things."
>
> I looked *over* and smiled.

Without special questions, Mrs. Dresser asked Brian and the others for their responses to the text, and his classmates demanded clarification. Routine questions and regular conferences helped Brian keep his playfulness intact — indeed, brought it to life. The most significant questions were probably those Brian asked himself. They were probably tacit versions of *reflect* (once again, what was it really like?), *expand* (what else is important to add?), and *select* (what is *most* important?).

The following diagram is an attempt to represent the recursive cycles of responses in conferences based on reflecting, expanding, and selecting. The act of reflection is subsumed under expansion, and reflection and expansion under selection.

FIGURE 1



Implications for Instruction

1. Don't expect to find a cause-effect or stimulus-response relationship between a question and a student's revision. There may be no immediate revisions following an appropriate response to a piece of writing, and a good writer may revise without good responses. Failure to revise does not mean a failed conference.

Regular support — time for writing, thoughtful discussion in conference, audience response from readings and publication, and explicit criteria for good writing — is more important than the right question. The results are long-term and cumulative.

2. Ask questions you want students to ask themselves, so that

they may have, as Hillary said, individual conferences with themselves. What they can do with you today, they will do on their own later. Writers internalize reflecting, expanding, and selecting, just as Hillary internalized the patterns of her classmates' questions.

3. The conference is not an exercise in listening to instructions as though the student were about to fill in the blanks of a worksheet. Ask the writer questions you do not know the answers to. No one knows exactly how the writer will finish the piece. The conference is a kind of collaboration, a form of working together more common at home, at play, and at work than in school.

4. The usefulness of a question doesn't come from the question itself but from the writer's application of it to a text. My tennis teacher told me to keep my eye on the ball, and the balls sailed past me. When he said, "Look at the lines on the ball," my accuracy began to improve. Until then, I didn't know what it meant or how it felt to keep my eye on the ball. We can sharpen our questions and comments, revise them, make them more specific. Just as writers may write many drafts, writing teachers may rewrite the scripts of their conferences. Tape recording conferences at first may help.

5. Ask students what questions or comments helped them revise. Ask students what questions they ask themselves and what advice they give themselves.

* * *

Writing is hard work. Writers occupy shifting ground. They must command information in at least three domains: (1) the text they've written, (2) memories about the experience the text represents, and (3) memories about the experience the text does not represent — through oversight or deliberate exclusion. Questions, answers, and paraphrases can blur the boundaries of the three domains. Amid conferences and rereadings, the text becomes new and unfamiliar. Beginners may cling to the text: it doesn't change, so it must be true. Even experienced writers find distance disorienting as well as clarifying. The multiple retellings and rememberings, like lenses, may refract text and memory. No wonder beginners reject most advice for improving their drafts.

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Writing and Reading

The Write Way to Read

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WRITERS GROW AS READERS. This year I used writing in the Reading Improvement Program at Peterborough Elementary School. My goal was to have each student demonstrate one year's growth on the *Diagnostic Reading Scales* (1981), an individually administered reading test. I formed two groups: a group of eight second-graders and a group of eight fourth-graders. The average growth during the eight-month instructional period was:

Second grade:	Oral reading — 16 months
	Silent reading — 32.7 months
Fourth grade:	Oral reading — 19.7 months
	Silent reading — 13.7 months

I met with each group of students for four one-hour sessions each week. Their meetings with me were in addition to the developmental reading program in their classrooms.

Literature

For forty to sixty minutes each week I read to the students. Generally the students selected the stories, but at times I chose them. I attempted to share the entire works of an author. With the younger children I read as many of Else Minarik's books as I could find in the town and school libraries. The children enjoyed hearing them, and we published six original Little Bear stories written by the second-graders. They wrote about their adventures but used Little Bear as the main character. I did not suggest that the children write Little

Bear stories. This idea occurred and spread spontaneously. I was impressed by their ability to mimic Else Minarik's style.

Else Minarik

"I have a new space helmet. I am going to the moon," said Little Bear to Mother Bear.

"How?" asked Mother Bear.

"I'm going to fly to the moon," said Little Bear.

"Fly!" said Mother Bear. "You can't fly."

(1957, pp. 36-37)

Tim Raesly, 2nd grade

"Oh, shucks," said Little Bear to Mother Bear.

"You'll have to wait until you grow up," said Mother Bear.

"I hope that I grow up fast," said Little Bear to Mother Bear.

And he waited and waited until he was grown up.

After each reading I asked the students what they thought of the story and insisted that they cite specifics to support their responses. I wanted the students to use the readings as models for good writing techniques and to be aware of the elements of good writing.

Writing

Beginning in the first session, I informed the students that they were going to be writing each day. They could write about anything they wished, but I told them that it is easier to write about something they know about. I also told them they could not throw out any papers or take them home because it would be important to look at all of their writings to see how they changed as writers. Each student received a manila folder in which the writings were to be filed.

I assured the students that they need not worry about spelling at this point because they were writing a first draft (introduction of writer's terminology) and that the most important thing when writing a first draft is to get ideas from the brain onto the paper. If they stopped to ask me how to spell a word, I told them, they probably would forget the idea, the important part of writing; they would have a chance to fix the spelling later. There was no resistance to writing and no lack of ideas.

Student-Teacher Conferences

I invited the students who wished to share their writings with me to sign their names on a section of the chalkboard under the heading: conference.

The student begins the conference by reading her piece of writing to me. I observe the decoding skills, the content and organization of the writing, the symbol-sound associations, and the mechanics. After the reading I summarize the story showing the student what she has communicated to me and giving her an opportunity to correct me if I have erred. The conference continues through the following steps:

1. *What do you think of this piece of writing?* My long range goal for students is to have them be self-evaluators of their writing. By withholding my reactions to the writing, I force the student to form an independent judgment. Also, if the student were not pleased with the piece of writing (which probably would not happen until two or three months into the program) and I reacted positively, she would be confused and might follow my lead rather than rely on her judgment.

2. *Why do (or don't) you like it?* I want the students to know what constitutes good writing and to be able to identify the ingredients, or absence of them, in their writings.

3. Next, I respond to the content, expressing what interests me and asking questions to point to the need for detail, organization, and clarity.

4. *If you wanted to add more information (change it, make it better), what could you do?* I am building a readiness for revision. It is important at this stage to include the "if," because early in the program, the students often do not want to revise. My ploy begins, "If you could wave a magic wand and revise this paper in one minute, how would you do it?"

5. I reinforce what the student has done correctly. This may include symbol-sound associations, standard spelling, punctuation, leads, use of details, and organization. I want to make certain that the student is aware of what she has done correctly so that she will repeat these elements in future writings.

6. *What do you plan to do with this piece of writing now?* The options include filing it in the folder, revising it or having a group conference which may lead to publication.

7. *What do you plan to do next?* If the student has chosen to revise the piece of writing, I ask, "How will you do it?" I want her to rehearse by talking through the revision process which she plans to use. If the piece is to be filed, or if the group conference is to be held later, I guide the discussion to future writing activities. I want her to think about what she will write next, and, more importantly, to know that there is

a next, that there is a continuing need for topic selection. If a new topic is chosen, I will ask pre-writing questions to help the student recall the specifics of the experience.

> Student: I'm going to write about going ice-fishing.
> Teacher: Great! Tell me about it.
> Student: Me and my father and my uncle went ice-fishing on Sunday.
> Teacher: Did you catch any fish?
> Student: Yeah. I got one and my dad got one and my uncle got two.
> Teacher: How do you catch fish through the ice?
> Student: Well, my uncle has an auger and we make a hole about this big and we put our lines in.
> Teacher: What's an auger?
> Student: It's a drill that cuts the ice.
> Teacher: Do you get cold when you're fishing.
> Student: No, because my uncle has a warming hut.
> Teacher: What's it like in the hut?

The verbal responses to the pre-writing questions provide a rehearsal for the next writing activity.

8. If the piece of writing is finished, that is, if the student chooses not to revise, I will teach one or two, never more, compositional and/or mechanical skills. Also, I may direct the student to edit all or part of the writing. I tell her to correct the text using the newly-taught skill and the skills which I have taught previously. Students grow to understand that editing is important during the final stages of the writing process.

If a student has a manuscript to be published, we have an editing conference. Based on the piece of writing, I select a new skill to teach. We may also review other skills. I generally have the student edit a page with me at the conference table and then send her to the Revise and Edit Center to complete the editing. If the piece of writing is long (ten pages or more), I tell her to edit three or four pages and I edit the others before publication.

Group Conferences

Before a student can have a manuscript published, she must have a group conference. The format I use is adapted from the one Peter Elbow presents in *Writing Without Teachers* (1973). The training period takes six to eight weeks and the process is implemented one step at a time. Four to six students constitute a group.

1. Reading: The writer reads her piece of writing to the group. While listening I take notes to help me remember my reactions. Eventually a student asks me what I am doing. After my explanation, about half of the group begins note-taking!

2. Pointing: Students tell the writer what they like in the piece of writing. Comments may point to the subject, an expression, the use of details, action, leads or whatever appeals to the listeners. It is important that the writer know what listeners (readers) like. She needs to know what is working in her writing so she may repeat it in a future piece. The listeners also benefit from pointing. Certainly they must attend to the reading. Improved listening skills are a by-product of group conferences. Also, as students identify what they like, they are pointing to what is good in writing and are beginning the internalization of the standards of good writing.

3. Summarizing: The listeners tell the writer what the piece of writing is about. The writer hears a brief summary from each listener. She then can decide if the communication is coming through as intended. If each listener gives a different summary, it may be that the writing has a problem of focus. Through summarizing the writer gains a sense of the "center of gravity" of the piece of writing.

I have found that the concept of focus is difficult for younger writers to understand. However, they can tell the writer what the writing is about, giving them practice in identifying the main idea, an important skill in reading and writing.

4. Questioning from listeners: The listeners ask the writer for more information or clarification. They may ask about confusing points or parts that do not ring true. The writer tries to respond to each question. This response becomes the rehearsal or pre-writing activity for revision. If requested to do so by the writer, I will note the questions asked. After the conference, the writer has a record of the parts of the writing which need to be revised. Although students do not always revise after a conference with me, all students revise after a group conference. Polly, a fourth grader, had four group conferences on one story and revised after each session. She continued coming back to the group seeking their approval.

5. Questioning from the writer: This is an opportunity for the writer to ask about parts which seemed troublesome to her, or about parts in which she was attempting to accomplish something specific and wants to know if she achieved her goal. Gerald wondered about the

dialogue in his story, but the listeners neither pointed to nor questioned it, so he asked them if the dialogue seemed real. My young students excitedly ask, "Did you like the story?" or "Do you think it should be published?" They receive honest answers.

Publishing

Publishing, the final step in the writing process, is making writing public. The most popular publishing method is the production of books. Early in the school year parents come during an evening workshop session and help to manufacture book covers. I type the finished manuscript and a volunteer completes the binding and titling process. The school librarian ceremoniously places a pocket and sign-out card in the book. The author has the privilege of being the first borrower. The returned book is kept in our class for four to six weeks so that other students in the program will have an opportunity to read it before it is placed in the school library for circulation. In June the authors take their books home.

Other forms of publishing include:

Radio: "Kid's Corner," produced by our local radio station, features Fritz Weatherbee, a colorful community newsperson, reading the writings with a complementary musical background. Last Halloween Fritz read Steven's book *The Killer*, complete with voice changes, echo chamber and music. In addition to being broadcast on the radio, the tape provided entertainment for classroom Halloween parties.

Gifts: The students love to present a gift of a published book to a family member for special occasions. There is no more appreciative audience.

Bulletin boards, walls, doors, furniture: Writings are posted any place where people can see them. Often all drafts are displayed to show the revisions made during the process of writing.

Letters home: At the beginning of the year when the writings are generally shorter and not appropriate for books, the students pick their favorite text and include it in a letter home describing their activities in the program.

Newspapers: Supplements which feature students' writings; articles about the program which include writings; a column which features writing each week.

Readings: Students read their manuscripts at assemblies, Young Authors Conferences, and in classrooms.

Show-off Time

Close to the spirit of publishing is Show-off Time. I look for every opportunity through which my students can share their knowledge of the writing process. They become experts who sit on a panel in classrooms and answer questions put forth by me and other students about the writing process. They demonstrate group conferences for student and adult audiences. The local nursing home residents stapled booklets for our first drafts. On our thank you visit the students brought their drafts and published books to explain how they used the writing process. Steven, the author of the Halloween story, *The Killer*, brought the radio tape to the class parties. After being introduced as the author, he answered questions about the process he used in writing the story.

* * *

I have formal and informal proof that the writing process approach improves the reading ability of students. What causes the reading growth?

The student who engages in writing is manipulating the units of written language and probably is gaining awareness of how the units can be combined to communicate messages. She also must attend to the details of print while moving from the message to the words to the individual letters. "The poor reader tends to specialize in words or sounds and may be ignoring the details by which letters are distinguished. But this is not possible in early writing. All features of language hierarchy must . . . receive attention as the child builds letters into words, words into phrases and phrases into sentences and stories." (Clay 1979)

Furthermore, in order for children to learn about written language, they need to experiment with the elements to discover the controlling principles. Children learn by "messing around" with objects, by turning them upside down and inside out. They need to manipulate the symbols and play with the varying combinations to explore the limits within which a form may be varied and still be recognized. This exploration is necessary for the complex learning of reading and writing to be mastered.

Writing is thinking. Beginning writers are forced to think about the symbol-sound associations and must decide which letter to use to represent a sound. Also, writers make decisions about topic, information, words, letters, dots. Each decision involves thinking about the options available and choosing one. The conference questions force the writer to give reasons for choosing a particular option. Thinking is required from the beginning to the end of the writing process.

Student writers know that writing is an expression of thought. They know a message is encoded in the symbols. They write with meaning; therefore they read for meaning. They hunt for the message. The initiative and self-reliance developed through writing carry over into reading. Students are forced to take an active role in writing, and they expect to take as active a role in reading. Some of my second-grade students discovered an article written by my son about the state legislative budget. They studied the text for fifteen minutes decoding the words and trying to understand the message. It never occurred to them that they might not be able to read it.

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Writing and the Reading Response

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IN AUGUST I FINISHED making my plans for teaching reading and language. Everything was ready for the upcoming school year.

Knowing my fourth-grade students would be coming to my class with three years of intensive phonic and word recognition instruction, I chose a basal reader that had interesting stories and emphasized comprehension. I was certain the students would become involved with these stories and write answers to questions by using information from the text and drawing on their own experiences.

I outlined my schedule. The students would read the assigned selection independently. The group would meet to discuss the story, and I would take care to elicit the particular information *I* wanted to have included in their written responses. I was confident that, after the group discussion, the students would return to their seats, form their responses, find support for their positions, and write clear, organized responses.

One afternoon in early October, I faced a stack of new compositions that held the answers to the first reading assignment. The discussion had gone well with this group. The children had grasped the meaning of the story — or at least my meaning of the story.

Not one student came close to my expectations. Their responses were two or three sentences at the most with no supporting statements or examples from the text. I was disappointed. Had I chosen the wrong basal, placed the students at the wrong level, or were my expectations too high?

I continued to puzzle over this problem at home that evening. I decided to lengthen the discussion period and have each member of the group summarize his responses to the questions before writing.

The next attempt produced slightly better responses. A few examples from the text appeared. "Progress is being made," I assured myself. The uphill climb continued for several months.

At the same time I was using a writing process approach to teach writing and language. It was successful. A visitor stepping into my classroom during Writer's Workshop might see several children discussing topic choices for a new piece and finding what the *real* story is. Other children would be working independently on their drafts. Still another group of children, possibly with me, would be having a conference about the pieces they were currently writing. Perhaps it would be the day when a child had finished her piece and announced triumphantly, "Wow. It's done. This one took six drafts and I had to write a lot of leads. But it was worth it. I like it."

As the school year reached the midpoint I began to see what writing process was enabling the children to do. They understood they were constructing something. They also realized that drafting and revision meant looking at their topics from different angles, experimenting with new ideas, and learning to evaluate reader-responses during conferences. My students were thinking about language and were manipulating it to make their writing better.

Reading was still progressing slowly. My success with writing made me more dissatisfied with the children's lack of involvement with reading.

One Sunday evening, as I was planning for the following week I stumbled upon an idea out of frustration. The reading answers had been poor the week before and my reaction was, "They will do the assignment over." When I calmed down it became clear — drafting and conferring might be a way to have my students respond in a thoughtful way to what they have read.

My plan for reading changed. After reading the selection, the students would write a first draft without the benefit of a directed discussion. Then the group would meet for a small-group conference as they normally did in Writer's Workshop. In this conference, the first drafts would be read and the responders would offer comments and suggestions. I reserved the last several minutes for the writers to make notes about possible revisions. When the second draft was completed, the students would have individual conferences with other students or me.

The responses to the first story using the new strategy showed immediate improvement. The children had begun to expand their responses.

Nine-year-old Susan's first draft response to a question asking how Henry David Thoreau viewed nature was, "He liked it and spent a lot of time outdoors."

This typical response indicated she had read the text. It also seemed to indicate that Susan had not felt the intensity of Thoreau's passion for the outdoors.

The children and I asked probing questions during the group conference: "How do you know he liked it?" "Can you think of ways to *show* he cared for nature?" "What makes his caring so unique?" "How is this different from the way everyone views nature?"

Susan was familiar with these types of questions. Students used these questions with each other in Writer's Workshop. This was her final draft response:

> Some people observe nature like this rushing down the forest path, huffing and puffing, stopping every 20 yards and saying plainly "Oh that's nice." Some people go to the park or zoo. Some choose to stay at home in front of the T.V. set. Henry David Thoreau observed nature in a special way, fields and streams, sights and sounds, sitting on rocks for hours at a time, looking through his microscope and spyglass, caring for little saplings that weren't strong enough to stay up. Cutting and splitting with his jackknife, capturing sights and sounds with his notebook, and pressing plants and leaves with an old music book.

The students had also learned to answer a different type of question. When asked to tell the author's purpose in writing the selection, Susan's final draft read:

> The author's purpose in writing this story was: he really cared about wildlife and wanted us to care too. He wanted us to respect all living things just as he did. And most of all he wanted us to think before we do.
>
> Made up Example
>
> If you go to the beach and pick up a star-fish, and decide to take it home, just think if everyone took one starfish home, there wouldn't be any starfish left. Starfish would become endangered maybe even extinct. And if starfish became extinct, there will probably be an overpopulation of mussels and clams and so on.

Conference questions were also different: "Why do you think this is the author's purpose?" "What examples from the text support your point of view?" "Can you think of any others?"

As in Writer's Workshop, the students were also looking at the organization of both their own answers and their peers'. They retold what they had heard other people read, following with the question, "Is this what you meant to say?" The children listened to see if the writer's position was clear from the beginning. They were learning how to construct well organized answers by listening and responding to other student's answers and by receiving comments about their own.

Susan's response illustrates another virtue of this approach. She made a connection between her interpretation of the author's main purpose and a concept she had become familiar with — the dependency and effects the elements of nature have upon each other. This addition to her answer demonstrates how the drafting and conferring process led her to relate two concepts from print and draw from her own knowledge to make up an example.

The group conference helped the children to see other points of view. Differences of opinion arose when students were asked to tell whether a certain character was good or bad and why. They were able to point out supporting details omitted by another child who had taken an opposing point of view. This did not, however, change their own stand. When asked why not, the typical response would be, "I have found more examples of good things she did, and I think they are more important." Again, these discussions brought the children closer to the story and helped sharpen their support for positions. This was reflected in the written responses.

At first I directed much of the group conference. As the weeks passed, the children started to model my questions. They could also suggest more details that might be helpful. I was pleased to see the importance of my role in the group conference decrease.

After using the writing process strategy with several stories, I discussed with the students the types of conference questions that had seemed most useful for a specific question. As a result, they began to use more appropriate questions during the conference. This improved the quality of the conferences and lessened the amount of time necessary for conferring.

Susan had been learning to decide how much time and consideration certain details deserved in her own writing. Through conferences in Writer's Workshop, she realized she spent more time developing the important parts of her pieces and would write more about those parts. Susan brought this ability into reading. She wrote:

> Eugenie Clark didn't say right out that she thought spearfishing was more exciting, the way you could tell was, she only wrote about three sentences about above water spear-fishing. She wrote about 4 or 5 paragraphs about under water spearfishing.

Looking at this story the same way she looked at her own writing, Susan noticed the author spent more time describing one aspect of a topic. Susan was looking at the text the way a writer does and was gaining a deeper understanding of the author's message.

Using this strategy to teach reading requires more time than conventional procedures found in teacher's manuals. (Six days for each story seemed to be my average.) I was concerned about this. Was it worth taking this much time?

Looking over the children's work at the end of the year and seeing what the new strategy had accomplished helped me find the answer. These fourth graders had done what I had originally expected and more. They moved into the story and analyzed its structure. They took positions, found justifications, and formed written responses. They received direction from the conferences and learned to give direction as well. The drafting helped the children to organize and reorganize their thoughts. They made discoveries about the story and their reactions while they drafted.

It was worth taking the time for this.

Young Writers as Critical Readers

by THOMAS NEWKIRK
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IN HIS BOOK, *The Child's Concept of Story*, Arthur Applebee (1978) reports an exchange between a researcher and a six-year-old student, Stephen. Stephen is asked to pick a story he doesn't like, and he nominates "Sleeping Beauty." The interview continues:

> Researcher: If you were telling "Sleeping Beauty," could you change it so that you would like it?
> Stephen: No.
> Researcher: Why not? Is it alright to make changes in stories?
> Stephen: No.
> Researcher: Do you think you could make it better?
> Stephen: No.
> Researcher: Why not?
> Stephen: Because you can't rub out the words. (p. 39)

Stephen, like many students at all levels, views written language as unassailable, as beyond criticism. Any reading program must acknowledge this potential of written language to intimidate, to bully the reader into submission. Indeed, any reading program must acknowledge the case against literacy, what I will call "Plato's Challenge."

Plato claimed, in his dialogue *Phaedrus*, that written language, because of its fixedness, inhibits inquiry:

> . . . writing involves a similar disadvantage to painting. The productions of painting look like live beings, but if you ask them a question, they maintain a solemn silence. The same holds true for written words; you might suppose they understand what they are saying, but when you ask them what they mean by anything, they simply return the same answer over and over again. (1973, p. 97)

For Plato, the most important intellectual activity was a process of question and answer — the dialogue. Written language lacks the dynamic possibilities of oral dialogue; where dialogue allows for rebuttal, clarification, and elaboration, written language "returns the same answer over and over again." The fixed quality of written language frustrates the ongoing process of inquiry. It invites acceptance and not interrogation. By its very appearance on the page, written language encourages the belief that "you can't rub out the words." Such is Plato's Challenge.

I will argue that a writing program which involves students in the process of creating texts can combat this critical paralysis. Writing programs can make texts less imposing. By writing, students can begin to view written language as the result of human choices and not as something fixed and authoritative. By working on their own *unfinished* texts, students have the opportunity to propose possible changes. And because they generate these alternatives, they learn to evaluate them — they learn, in other words, to develop critical judgment.

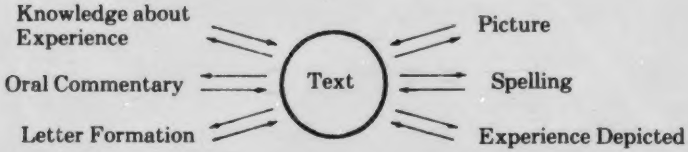
The Evolution of Judgments

Transcripts of writing conferences and of interviews with students, collected by Donald Graves in his two-year study of children's writing, illustrate both the changes in the way students evaluate writing and the teaching strategies that sharpen evaluative skills.

While many of the standards that students apply to written language are idiosyncratic, there is a definable progression from *proto-critical* judgments to *critical* judgments. Proto-critical judgments are reactions to the embedded text, to the written language, and to a variety of associated elements of the text: the picture that may accompany the writing, the handwriting, the spelling, the experience itself. The text is not viewed by the student as autonomous. Consequently, when asked to evaluate writing, the student may not comment directly on what, to the mature reader, is the written message. For example, one second grader was asked to indicate the best part of a story about things to do in the winter. The student leafed through the pages of his story and stopped at a page describing how he and his friends poured maple syrup onto the snow and ate the sugared snow. Licking his lips, he turned to me and said, "This one." The text is fused with the experience and the evaluation of the text is an evaluation of the experience depicted.

Similarly, the text can be fused with the picture. In many first-graders' compositions the writing does not occupy a distinct part of the page; it is part of a unified composition (see Kathy Matthews' article in this collection). In fact, students frequently use the words *write* and *draw* interchangeably. Because text and picture function as a unit, the student often sees no reason to add information that is included in the picture; and when asked to select his or her best piece of writing the child is likely to pick the page with the best picture.

The embedded text might best be pictured as a central molecule bonded to several other elements of writing.



Just as the student must see the writing as distinct from the picture and the experience depicted, he or she must see it as distinct from the basic encoding skills of spelling and letter formation. The text must also be seen as distinct from the oral commentary that a student offers to fill in gaps of information. Finally, the text must be seen as distinct from the child's knowledge about the subject; without this separation, the writer assumes something has been communicated when the information is only in the writer's head.

As the child develops critical reading skills, two concurrent processes occur. The bonds between text and these other elements are loosened, and the student learns to apply standards appropriate to the distinct text. Some of the links seem to break naturally. As spelling and letter formation become routine, the child is less likely to cite these elements in evaluations. The decline in the importance of the drawing is probably more complex. Part of its decline is no doubt due to the child's sense of the relative importance of writing and drawing in our culture. In part, the drawing comes to have less importance in the composing process as the writer learns to plan internally. And, in part, the writer, as he or she becomes more fluent, comes up against the limitations of drawing as a mode of communication. Words can be used more quickly than pictures; they allow the child to write about events that would be difficult to draw; and they allow the writer to change directions without feeling limited by a picture that has been drawn.

Other separations seem to come with greater difficulty. The following excerpt from a writing conference with a first grader shows a child who views her text as embedded, and it shows the questioning procedure that the teacher uses to push the child to see the text as autonomous.

Donna: Here's my thing. (Reads the last line. "I had to walk home.") These scratches are supposed to be my ice skates.
Teacher: How were you carrying them?
Donna: Around my neck so I could carry them.
Teacher: They're hanging around your neck like that? (demonstrates)

Donna nods and reads: "The end." I forgot how to write *the end*. (She begins to read her story.)

When I Went Ice Skating
Page 1: I had to put on warm clothes like a warm sweater and a warm pair of pants.
Page 2: I had to walk to the ice skating pond. (She interjects, "Cause I did so . . .")

Donna: Here (referring to the drawing at the top of her page) there wasn't enough room to *write* the head, so don't scream at me if the head's not there.
Teacher: (In mock horror) Where's the head?
Donna: OK. I'll bend it down like this so I have enough room to make the head. (draws the head) I'll try to keep it folded like that.
Donna: (resumes her reading)
Page 3: I fell a lot.
Page 4: I started to ice skate good.
Page 5: I skated a lot.
Page 6: I had to walk home.
The end.

Teacher: (turning the pages as she summarizes) You're talking about when you went ice skating. You said you put on warm clothes like a warm sweater and a warm pair of pants. And then you walked to the ice skating pond and then you fell a lot. And then you started to ice skate good. And you skated a lot and then you went home.
Donna: Is that a good story?
Teacher: What do you think?
Donna: Yes. It tells about what I did when I went ice skating yesterday. I think that's good to know what I did when I went ice skating yesterday.
Teacher: Is there anything else you did when you went ice skating?
Interruption.
Donna: You know, I think this story does make a little sense and tells what I did when I ice skated.
Teacher: You think it what?
Donna: I think it tells a little sense and tells what I did when I went ice skating. (Pause) I did fall a lot.
Teacher: How did you feel when you fell?
Donna: Cold. My sore toe was getting sorer every minute.
Teacher: Why was it getting sore?
Donna: Because I kept falling on my sore toe and that hurt — a lot.
Teacher: You said you fell down a lot and then all of a sudden you said you were skating good. How did you feel . . .
Donna: Because I was very happy when I started to skate good.
Interruption.
Teacher: Donna, if you think about this story and the story you wrote about the fantastic whale — remember that story — which do you think is better?
Donna: This one because I think it makes more sense. It tells you what I do when I go ice skating. And this one's true and the other one isn't — "The Fantastic Whale."
Teacher: Is there anything else you'd like to add to this story?
Donna: I think it's just right the way it is.
Teacher: (accepting Donna's decision) You like it just the way it is.

At first glance, this may seem to be an unsuccessful conference. It does not result in even a minor revision. Donna is as satisfied with her writing at the end of the conference as she was at the beginning. It does, however, provide a wealth of information about the way Donna views written language. The writing is bound closely to the picture, in fact, it seems secondary to the picture. Donna's first concern is how the picture showing her carrying her skates communicated information. She is willing to revise her drawing, but not her writing.

Different sources of information also seem to merge. The pictures do some of the work; the writing does some of the work; and the oral information that Donna supplies in the conference also does some of the work. When asked at the end of the conference whether she wants to revise the piece, she sees no reason to, because she clearly does not expect the writing, by itself, to do the complete job of communicating.

Donna's answer to her initial question about the quality of the writing, "I think it's good to know what I did when I went ice skating," indicates that the text has not clearly separated itself from the experience depicted; the quality of the experience lends an aura of quality to the writing.

It would be incorrect to see all of Donna's response as proto-critical, however. When she says that her writing "makes a little sense" (an expression she uses twice), she seems to be saying both that she has been true to the experience and has presented the experience in an ordered and comprehensible way. She has imposed constraint — what might be called *fidelity* — on her writing. By contrast, in "The Fantastic Whale" no such constraint was operating.

The teacher's questions push her to consider other critical criteria. The key question is, "Is there anything else you did when you went ice skating," a request for additional information that is repeated, in various forms, three other times in the conference. In effect, the teacher is trying to drive a wedge between the experience and the written text. Her question pushes Donna to at least consider information that is not written down. She is pushing Donna to see that the experience, in some significant ways, was different from her written text. And although Donna does not respond to this challenge by revising the piece, if she is asked these questions often enough, she will come to expect them in the conference and soon anticipate them by making them part of her own writing process, what one student called "giving myself a conference."

Initially, criteria such as truthfulness, elaboration, and focus seem to be applied singly or serially. A student may have one criterion that is applied to the exclusion of others, or the criteria may be applied one after the other. One student, for instance, felt that *action* was the most important quality of a story and would, when reading the stories of his classmates, rate every sentence for how much action it contained. Or a student may regularly ask a classmate to elaborate on how he or she felt. These criteria are also applied in an absolute quantitative way; the more action (or detail, or feeling) the better the story.

Calkins (1980) has defined a further development of critical ability where the criteria, rather than having distinct existences, contend with each other. Several third graders that Calkins studied seemed able to juggle multiple criteria: "Choices emerge from tension — between writing for information and writing for grace, between inclusion and focus, between intended meaning and discovered meaning" (p. 340).

Allan, a second grader in the Graves study, had noted this type of tension when he was asked to pick his best work at the end of the school year. Allan selected "When Brent Came Over" as his best story because it had the "most information." When asked what he meant by "information" he said, "A lot of detail, like you actually know what I'm trying to say," and as an example of "information" he read the following excerpt:

> I was tired. I climbed into bed. I was almost asleep when I heard the door slam. I quickly ran over to the window in my room and looked out. Brent was just getting into the car. Then I heard my mother drive off. The end.

Because of the detail, Allan claimed, "you can almost see what is going on."

But later in the interview Allan noted that there are times when detail gets in the way.

> Researcher: What do good writers need to do in order to write well?
>
> Allan: He has to know one thing. Space stories cannot have too much detail because they get boring. They get too boring if they have too much detail. They're not exciting if they have too much detail.
>
> Researcher: So sometimes you have to take the detail out.
>
> Allan: First, I read it to the class. And if everyone goes rrrr (rolling his eyes) then I know it's getting boring and I go back and cross out things.

Allan concluded the interview by showing all the detail that he crossed out in one of his space stories.

Two points should be made about Allan's concept of information. First, it is a qualitative term and not merely a quantitative one. While he talks about "a lot of detail," he does not mean mere accumulation but the capacity of detail to evoke an experience. A year earlier information was more of a quantitative term. Second, value of detail is conditional and not absolute. The attempt to depict an event in detail may cause the reader to lose the thread of a narrative. What was earlier a fixed rule (more detail makes for better writing) has become a rule of thumb (in most cases detail makes for better writing).

The fact that students can read their own work critically does not necessarily mean that these skills carry over into all the reading they do. This is an area where more research needs to be done. It does, however, seem at least plausible that a writing program that constantly asks students to make judgments as to clarity, completeness, order, interest, and consistency will have a beneficial effect on all reading. Such a program not only pushes students to define and apply evaluative criteria, it teaches them about the status of written language. The writer has an insider's view of written language. As an insider, as a maker of language, the writer is less likely to be intimidated by written language. Allan put it this way:

> Before I ever wrote a book I used to think there was a big machine, and they typed the title and then the machine went until the book was done. Now I look at a book and know that a guy wrote it. And it's been his project for a long time. After the guy writes it, he probably thinks about questions people will ask him and revises it like I do and xeroxes it to read to about six editors. Then he fixes it up like how they say.

A writing program can thus take on a responsibility that reading programs have, to a large degree, abdicated. A student without the ability to make evaluative judgments is still only partially literate. Even students who can accomplish the important comprehension tasks such as locating the main idea, summarizing, and drawing inferences are controlled by the written language if they must accept the writing on its own terms, if they lack the power to question the integrity of the text before them. Lacking this power, they are only deferentially literate; they are polite readers. Like good guests, they do not ask impertinent questions.

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A Writer Reads, A Reader Writes

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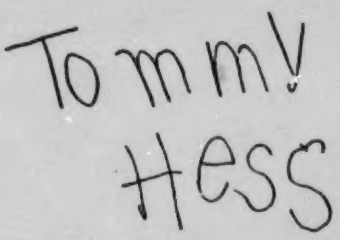
WRITERS ARE READERS. As a teacher of both subjects, I always knew children were both writers and readers. But it wasn't until I conducted a case study of one child's writing progress that my attention was directed to the kinds of reading the writer did in order to make revisions. What follows is an account of Tommy and his changing concerns as a writer along with the evolution of the kinds of critical judgments he made as a reader of his own text.

Six-year-old Tommy is a writer . . . a creator of text. During his first year of school he wrote two plays, many explanations and descriptions for art and science projects, numerous math problems, and countless letters and notes to friends and family members. He kept a journal during the first month of school. He also wrote twenty-six stories, nine of which were published by the school publishing company.

Tommy kept a collection of his stories in writing folders at school. He had a folder for work in progress and one for accumulated work. This paper will focus on his collection of writings and more specifically the pieces Tommy evaluated as being his best. We will focus on the development of Tommy as a writer-reader.

All of Tommy's writing came as a result of his desire to express himself. He always chose what he was going to write about. Therefore he had control of the content. He was able to determine what was important for him to work on and what should be abandoned.

When Tommy entered school he was five years, ten months old. When handed a blank nine-by-twelve inch journal with unlined pages, he opened it to the first page and carefully wrote:



Tommy
Hess

FIGURE 1

in the upper left hand corner. It is apparent that Tommy is familiar with handling books. He knows that writing is linear and horizontal, top to bottom and in a left to right direction. Most important, Tommy knows that writing serves a purpose. By writing his name, he claims possession of his book.

In the middle of the next page Tommy draws and writes:

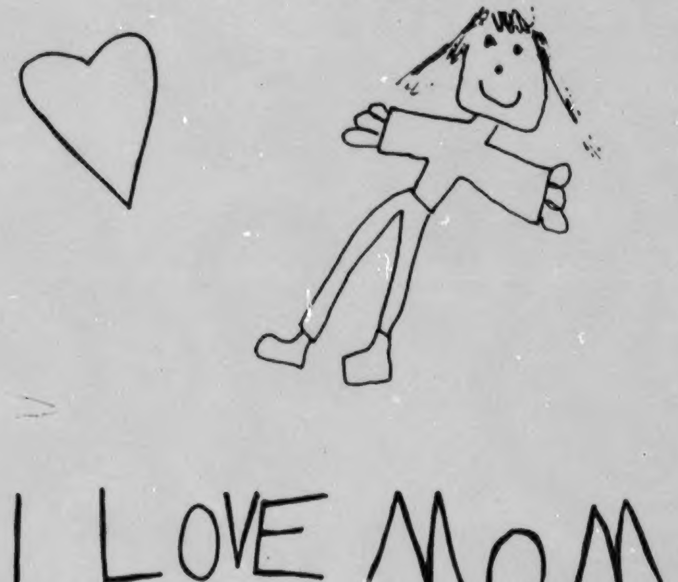


FIGURE 2

Tommy is writing 'safe' words. And why not? For years he saw his sister's school papers lavishly adorned with smiling faces and stars, proudly displayed on the refrigerator. These papers were recognized by her teachers (I must admit I was her first-grade teacher), parents and classmates because they were perfect. Tommy has come to school wanting smiling faces and stars. Instead of focusing on the correctness of his work, I focused on the content.

"Oh, you love your Mom!"

Tommy nods his head. After a long pause I ask, "Could you tell me more about that?"

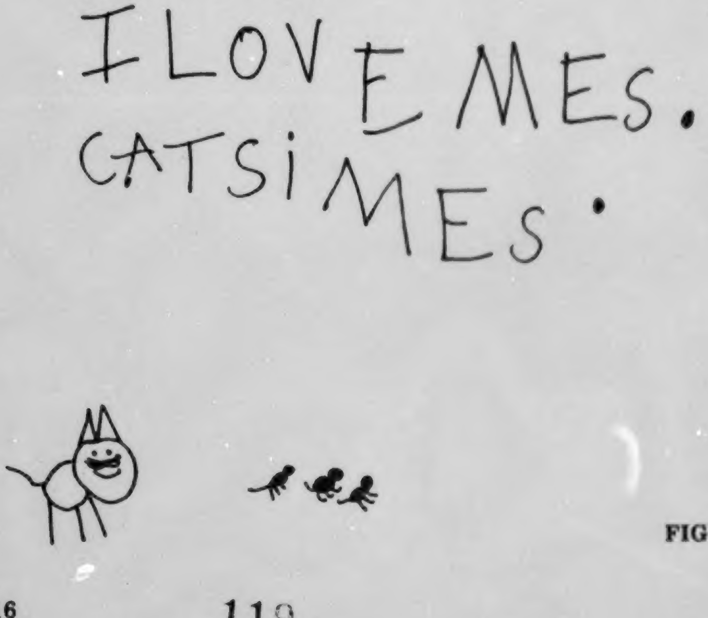
"She's nice," he answers.

I repeat, "Oh, she's nice."

"Yeah, like this morning when she brought me to school. I don't like riding the bus and . . ."

Tommy's flowing dialogue about his Mom lets him know he does indeed know more about his topic. He also knows I am interested in hearing about it. No mention is made of Tommy's neat, perfectly spelled words. Instead, I focus on the message his words conveyed. At the end of the conference Tommy does not add any new information to his writing. Some may think the conference was not successful. I know to be patient. Tommy needs his oral language to help tell part of the story. The writing will come later.

For one week Tommy continues to write messages with safe words. On September 11 he writes:



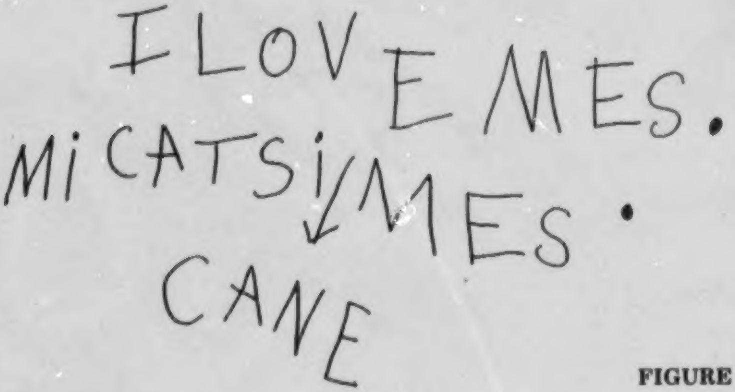
I LOVE MES.
CATSIMES.

FIGURE 3

He is using some safe words and some inventions. He is using periods. During a conference, as Tommy reads his writing, he realizes something is missing. He's confused. It doesn't say what he wants it to say.

I LOVE MICE.
CAT IS MICE.

does not make sense. He reads it again and rewrites. His story now looks like:



I LOV EMES.
Mi CATSi↓MES.
CANE

FIGURE 4

His message reads:

I LOVE MICE.
MY CAT IS CHASING MICE.

After a content conference I asked Tommy, "How did you know to add these words?"

He replied, "Easy. When I read it, it wasn't right. I left words out."

Having read his message, Tommy realized that in order for his intended message to be understood by others he needs to add more information. At this point he is adding at the word level. Consider the difference between:

CAT IS MICE.
MY CAT IS CHASING MICE.

He has also added conflict which is an essential ingredient to stories.

In this episode, Tommy writes, reads (with a mediator present), and revises to make his text more meaningful. (When asked about the arrow, he explains that he saw me use one on the chalkboard when I was writing and he thought he'd try one!)

The next day Tommy writes:

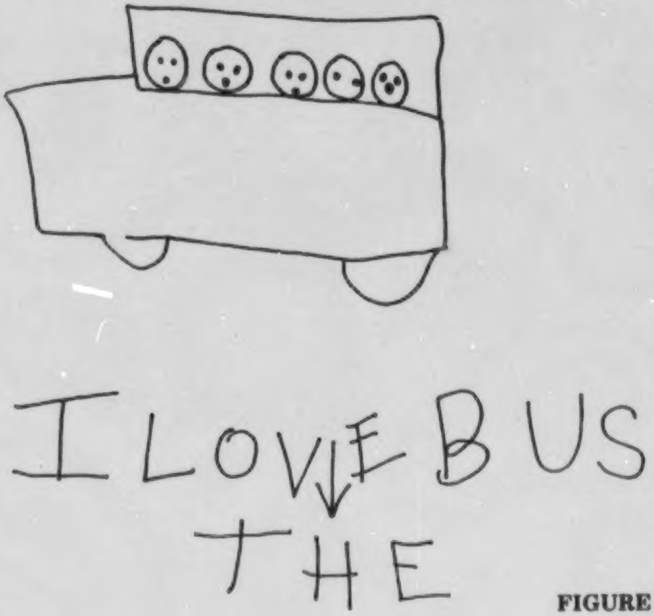


FIGURE 5

After composing, Tommy reads his message to himself and revises on his own. He makes an arrow between the "V" and "E" in love and inserts the word "THE." When a writer makes changes in his text, it is because he has *read* the text and the intended meaning is not coming through to the audience. In this case the audience is the writer himself. Even when a writer talks to others about his writing and considers their comments, the writer must still reread his text in order to know in what ways the new information could affect his text. If he chooses to include the new information, where should it be added? If he is excluding information, what should be excluded?

When Tommy filled all the pages of his journal he began writing stories in pre-made booklets with six pages plus a cover and backing. [Since this is not a study of invented spelling, I will transcribe the texts in these stories for ease of reading. The revisions will be shown in italics. I will double-space between pages.]

On October 6, Tommy made his first attempt at writing a continuing story.

> **My Cat *and* Dog**
>
> My cat
> My dog
>
> My dog was freezing.
>
> My *dog* chases me.
>
> My *cat* runs.
>
> They fight.
>
> The end

In this piece of writing, the language is rather telescopic leaving out the richness of the experience. Bissex (1980) explains:

> In early writings there is no clear distinction between writer and audience in the sense of someone who does not automatically share all the writer's unexpressed knowledge (200).

If Tommy knows it, then you too must know it. More is happening with the cat, dog and Tommy than the writer has included in the text. He realizes something is missing but his concern lies in how the message sounds when he reads it to himself. Because he is still his own audience, he revises in order to make his sentences make sense to himself. Alone, he adds words on four pages. During a conference he rereads and crosses out one of his initial revisions. His steps in composing look like this:

writes → reads (alone) → revises (alone) → rereads (mediator present) → revises (mediator present)

In *Thought and Language*, Vygotsky (1962) speaks of mediated learning:

> What the child can do in cooperation today he can do alone tomorrow. Therefore the only good kind of instruction is that which marches ahead of development and leads it; it must be aimed not so much at the ripe as at the ripening function (104).

During conferences the mediator (teacher) "marches ahead of development and leads it" by raising questions for the writer to consider during the composing process. Because of the predictable nature of the conferences, Tommy learns to anticipate the questions I will ask and begins to ask these questions of himself as he writes.

One month later Tommy's writing is more complete, in that he is writing full sentences, but still telescopic in the way he tells only the main events of his experience.

My Cast

I went to the hospital.
I went because I thought my arm was broken.

I did take x rays.

I went to McDonald's.

Now we are off to the bone doctor's.
He put on the cast.

The end

During a sharing time, the children act as mediators with their many questions for Tommy.

Why did you go to the hospital?
Did you break your leg?
Did they put a jacket on you when you got x rays?
Why did you go to McDonald's?
Etc.

When Tommy rereads his story to himself, he does what most first graders do at the beginning of the year — he adds more information to the first event in the story. He is beginning to show an awareness for an audience other than himself — he is considering their questions and making an attempt to answer them in his text.

Tommy trembled as the tears rolled down his cheeks when he read his next story. I think he realized his audience would have many questions for him and he would need to talk about his topic in order to answer them.

I Want A Parakeet

One day I thought I should hurt my cat to get a parakeet.

I didn't *want to have a vote.*
And we had a vote. I lost.

I could have two pets.
I had a cat and a dog.

I cried.

I hate parakeets. I had dreams.

The next night I had no dreams.

Know why I wanted to get a parakeet?
I was dumb.

Tommy was admitting that he wanted to hurt his cat and he had a difficult time explaining why. While Tommy listened to each question and answered and defended what he had written, he was also considering what to do with all the new information that needed to be included. He rereads his text with an audience in mind and tries to include what is needed. It is apparent in his last page when he directly addresses his audience, "Know why I wanted to get a parakeet?" that he intends for his text to have a reader other than himself. This author-to-reader communication is an "acknowledgement on the part of the author that the readers' views and concerns are relevant to the story." (Steinberg and Bruce, 1980)

As Tommy becomes more aware of his audience, it is important to him to try to write all he knows about his topic. Along with "does this make sense?" Tommy is now concerned with "what shall I say next?" Sometimes he confuses his audience as in his next piece.

December 11

I Want A Cat

1 One day my mom said that I am getting a present.

2 My present was a cat. My cat is black and white.

3 My cat is nice.

6 My cat goes to the vet.

9 And one day my dog got hurt.

8 Sometimes my cat and my dog fight.

5 My cat is mean to the bird.

7 I love my cat.

4 I love my cat. My cat was chasing a bird.
When the bird climbed up in a tree my cat was up on top of the tree.
My cat fell off the tree.

The story is about a cat and a bird. But when Tommy's dog enters, the reader is not quite sure of all the ties. His peers tell him that it's all mixed up. They don't understand it. He continues to add on to the last page then realizes that it is still mixed up. He takes his booklet apart and reorders the pages. (The numbers on the left of each sentence indicate the new order.) When finished he rereads it one last time and is satisfied the way it is.

After Christmas, Tommy wrote a twenty-two page story titled *My Radio Car*. It is apparent he has a lot to "say next." When Tommy read it to the class, Arik commented that it wasn't all about his radiocar. There were some other things in it too. He decided to focus on his topic about the radio car and to exclude several pages. He's still not ready to throw pages away. Instead he puts the excluded pages together to make a new story about Christmas.

January 6

My Radiocar

My radiocar is nice. My radiocar has a remote control.

I got my radiocar on Christmas.

The radiocar is the best present.

I wanted a radiocar.

I have a blue radiocar.

My radiocar turns.

My radiocar goes reverse.

My radiocar is excellent.

I got some stickers to put on the radiocar.

My dad put on the stickers.

This is the bottom of the radiocar.

My radiocar is fast.

My radiocar is fun.

My radiocar needs batteries.

The batteries run out because I used the radiocar too much.

I love my radiocar.

The end

My Christmas

I got fish.

I got a Mighty Mo. My Mighty Mo is a baby toy. Not too much of a baby toy.

I got a pinball machine.

I got a radiocar.
My radiocar is fun.

This was the best Christmas.

The end

In a discussion on structural devices in stories, Applebee (1980) mentions two types. *My Radiocar* is an example of *centering*, where some central element is constant throughout the story. *Chaining* is when one event implies or leads to the next event and so on. Tommy's next story is an example of chaining. As he completes each idea, Tommy is thinking, "and then what happened." This question leads him on to new text.

March 16

I Went to the Village Store on My Bike

I am coming home from C.C.D.

I stopped at the store.

My mom said I could go to the Village Store on my bike.

I am getting the pump to pump the tires.

I am eating.

I am washing my bike.

I am taking off. My sissy sister said, "Go slow." I said, "No."

I fell off my bike because I went too fast.
I didn't get hurt.

Then I went slow.

I said, "Sissy Miss Hess, you go single file."

It was fun going single file.

I am going fast.

On the road was painted SCHOOL.

We are playing at the Rockwell School.
I am playing hopscotch.

We are going to the Village Store.

I got a big mouth. It cost 20¢.

We are going back to the Rockwell School and I had fun. I had the most fun climbing over the fence to get my mitten.

I am going home now. It took seven minutes to get home.

I said, "Let's go fishing."
My sissy sister said, "Yes."

We are fishing. I did not catch any fish.

I am walking home.

The end

When Tommy started *I Went to the Village Store on My Bike* he announced that it would be his longest story ever. His main concern is "what happened next?" After writing each page, he rereads what he wrote considering what should come next. To Tommy, everything is of equal importance. When others listen to his story, there aren't many questions. Readers are satisfied with the amount of information and detail given.

In Tommy's next piece of writing he discovers that once again he has two stories.

April 15

The Teachers Picketing About Proposition 2½

I am going out to get in the car.
We are going to Boston *because my mom is going to picket about 2½.*
I do not want to go to watch. I want to see other things. There are lots of things to see you know.
How to picket. You have to take

a sign and hold it up. My mom came to picket.
I didn't want to watch it. So I just stood there. I said, "I want to go to the Children's Museum."

My mom said, "Yes." I was happy.

My mom is there because *My mom is going to picket because she doesn't want to lose her job.*

I didn't want to watch it.

The teachers picketing was not over.
I was sad. *There was 50,000 people picketing.*

As Tommy interacts with his text it is apparent he has many concerns. He wants to tell the reader why he is doing something, how he feels about it, and what he actually does. There is concern for his audience when he tells how to picket . . . another direct address, "You have to. . . ." He freely adds new information, deletes what he feels is unnecessary, and focuses more on the picketing rather than the Children's Museum (probably because he never made it to the museum!).

Conclusion:

Tommy has shown through these samples of writing how his concerns about his text have changed. At first, he is his own audience and answering his own questions. Through conferences he learns the questions others have of his text. He knows text must be meaningful. He revises first to make his text more meaningful to himself and then later for his audience. Through his revisions we have seen his concerns as a reader. He focuses on two questions. Does it make sense? What do I write next? As the year progresses he begins to consider sequencing, focusing, and accuracy, but only after he has satisfied his first two questions. He freely adds new and deletes unnecessary information.

Tommy is a writer who reads his text and rewrites in order to make it more readable for others. He is a critical producer of reading.

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Assessment

Using Writing Folders To Document Student Progress

by ANNE BINGHAM
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IT WAS PARENT open-house night. Erica, grade three, tugged at her mother's hand. She made a bee-line for the box of writing folders, located her own, and sat down for a story session with her mother. Terry, a first-grader, uses his free time in school to pull his writing folder out of the box and reread stories he has written. I, too, frequently go to the writing folders. At report card time and during parent conferences, the decorated cardboard box is at my elbow. It's my answer to accountability. The folders document the success of my writing program to various people in a variety of ways.

What is a writing folder and what does it contain? I use legal size manilla folders, closed on each end. There is one for each child in my multi-level primary classroom. They are housed in a wallpaper covered box near my desk, accessible to both myself and the children. Almost everything a child writes during the year is dropped into the folder. There will be many rough drafts — pieces that remain as written with little revising or editing. There will be some edited, polished, copied pieces; although sometimes these are bound into books and displayed elsewhere in the room. A few finished writings may have gone home. There should be some stories, however, which show all stages of writing: perhaps a picture or a details list representing prewriting activities, a rough draft, any other drafts, and the final edited piece copied by the child or typed by the teacher. All these parts of the story are dated and stapled together. There is a rule that all writing must be dated before it goes into the writing folder. Dates are essential so a child's writing progress can be traced. As the year moves along I find it helpful to also group the writings — fall, winter, spring — using a large paper clip or a folder within a folder. Then it's easier to find pieces needed to show a progression of learned skills.

Documenting progress is the primary purpose of the folders. When preparing for parent conferences I often pull a September writing, one from November, and one or two others depending on the time of year. These writings can be examined from a number of viewpoints:

- Clarity of expression — Has the child's ability to express himself in writing improved?
- Inclusion of details — Is more important and interesting information included?
- Revision and editing — Has the child shown willingness to make changes in his/her writing? Is there evidence of increased skill with this process?
- Handwriting — Is letter formation improving?
- Spelling — Are there fewer common word errors? Is a first grader using more accurate beginning consonant sounds? Adding vowel sounds?
- Mechanics — Are periods and capital letters used more accurately in January than in September? Has Suzie started using quotation marks?

Parents feel very positive about being shown student growth in this way, and I feel that I can be more objective in my evaluation when it's based on work I have in front of me.

The children, too, find it valuable to look back on their progress. They enjoy reviewing the topics they've chosen to write about and the types of writing they've done — fiction, non-fiction, poetry, letters, reports. More important, they can be held accountable for those skills with which they have demonstrated success. In this way the folders may be used as a teaching tool. Similarly, the folders can be used to help students understand the writing process better. Once children have been through the process they can review this accomplishment. "It's easier to start, now that I know it doesn't have to be perfect to begin with," says eight-year-old Jonah. He's discovered that there are many opportunities to change a story. Looking back over almost a year, he's written about his dog three times. Each time it gets better; he adds another anecdote. If all the activities are represented in the writing folder — prewriting, revision, and editing — these can be used to demonstrate just what the writing process is, or perhaps to emphasize one aspect such as the value of listing details or the need for careful editing.

On occasion the teacher may find it useful to go through a few writing folders with administrators, other teachers, or visitors. They are useful tools for explaining a writing program.

Another use for the folders is as a resource in parent education. I've used them this way on at least two occasions: once to arrange a display explaining the writing of primary-age children, and once to show spelling progress of first graders using invented spelling. The display on the writing process was prepared for a young authors fair held at our school one spring. It featured several pieces of child writing as they evolved from prewriting activities to the final edited stage. There were pictures, notes for a report, a list prepared for writing a class news story. These same stories were shown in first draft stage with cross-outs, added words, and other revisions. Then a final draft of each piece was displayed, copied by the child or typed by the teacher in the case of a first grader.

The explanation of invented spelling was written as a newsletter for parents. I copied work from two first graders over a year's time and added my comments. Parents found it helpful. I include below a part of that newsletter: "Here are examples of invented spelling of a first grader who I will call Randy. By examining his writing and the notes accompanying it you can follow this child's progress from September to early spring of his first grade year. The stages that follow are typical of many beginning writers:"

Randy: September

M F D K E T H he IS MIB
AS FND

"My friend Keith
He is my best friend."

- The word "my" is first represented by one letter — "M."
- Later "my" is spelled "MI" Randy guessed this from the name of the letter "I" — common in early spelling inventions. This is also true of "he," which happens to be correct.
- All capitals, no spaces, few vowels.

Randy: November

me en Keth tho
so bs hA RANDY how
ES ET ET ES
FON

"Me and Keith throw snowballs.
'Hey Randy, how is it?'
'It is fun.' "

- Spacing between words, some lower case letters.
- "HOW" is spelled correctly — remembered this from reading perhaps.
- Vowels used usually represent the long sound, except that Randy is experimenting with the letter "E" to represent the short "I" which he has not yet learned in reading. This is obviously the time to present that sound to him.
- Randy is writing dialogue.

Randy: January

i hAD A TAOD
I ckaLD him
FuNe

"I had a toad.
I called him funny."
(the beginning of a longer story)

- Length of stories is increasing.
- Still a mix of upper and lower case letters.
- "Had" and "him" are correct — both phonetic words for which he has learned all the elements.
- Has he seen "toad" somewhere? The letters are all there, order confused — good guess. He has not learned the "rule" about two vowels together.
- "Called" and "funny" are spelled phonetically. He has been working with "ck" in reading (lock, sock) — doesn't realize that combination comes at the ends of words.

Randy: March

IF i had A Rabit
i wod Mak Him A Nis
HOM anD He WiL
THIK That He is a
RiL PIRSIN

"If I had a rabbit I would make him a nice home and he will think that he is a real person." (part of a much longer story)

- Randy is now writing very long stories and expressing himself in many interesting ways. He is willing to try any word that makes good sense in the story. Randy sees himself as a successful writer. He works several days on one story. At home he writes both letters and stories spontaneously.

In some schools writing folders are passed on from teacher to teacher so that a longer sequence of development may be observed. Children, however, are very eager to take their writing home. The team of teachers with whom I work have arrived at a compromise. At the year's end we choose three representative selections from each child's writing folder. These selections are passed on to next year's teacher. All the other writing may go home with the child in June. Here are some selections from Randy's third grade writing folder. They demonstrate what can be discovered in a longer view of a child's writing and also contrast third grade writing development with that of a first grader. In most cases the spelling errors have been corrected in order to focus on other aspects of writing development. Capitals, punctuation, and revisions are exactly as Randy wrote them in first draft.

Randy: September

"The Thing in the Woods"

"Theres been strange noises in the woods gigantic footsteps and trees crashing then a gigantic growl. ~~one day a boy was out in the woods looking for where the monster~~ in front of the woods there was a house where a very curious boy named Mark lived. he wanted to find out . . ."

- Randy has been writing for two years now and he has developed skill in including details. The strange noises are specified: footsteps, trees crashing, a growl.
- Randy understands that changes can be made and that a cross-out in a first draft is acceptable. However, his revisions are brief, consisting of crossing out or inserting a few words. This draft is also crowded. Randy has forgotten to leave spaces between lines to allow for revision. Major revisions will be easier to deal with when he develops this habit again.
- Periods are used correctly, but he frequently forgets to capitalize the first word in a sentence. When asked to edit for this, he can quickly identify these words and capitalize them.
- Randy does not use commas.
- Verb tense is a problem (there's). When the story was read back to him, Randy picked this up — "It doesn't sound right."

Randy: December

"Mark and the Talking Pig"

Opening, version 1:

"Mark lives on a farm with his two brothers George and Jacques. one day his father came home with a new pig. Mark asked if he could have a pig? his father said 'only if we have some baby pigs.' . . ."

- The most striking thing about this story is that the beginning and the end have both been revised. Randy is becoming aware of the importance of both these story parts. During a conference about this story he was asked what parts he was concerned about. He pointed to the opening and commented that although he named two brothers in the first sentence they are never mentioned

Opening, version 2:

"Mark lives on a farm. one day *Mark was riding a horse when* his father came home with a new pig. Mark asked if . . ."

Ending, version 1:

"When Mark's father heard that he said 'You can talk!' Fat replied 'Of course. I was born on earth like you.' 'I know that but your a pig.' Then Fat said 'I'm a human pig.' and thats how Fat lived for the rest of his life."

Ending, version 2:

"When Mark's father heard that he said 'You can talk!' . . . 'I'm a human pig.' *'OH' said Mark's father.*"

again in the story. Once he was able to focus on the problem he made the change himself.

- Randy recognizes the question which Mark asks his father in the opening, but he uses the question mark incorrectly in this case.
- The changed ending was a bit more puzzling until I flipped over the last page and discovered the words "Chapter 2 — Fat's Birthday" followed by a short paragraph. This had been scribbled out and never completed. At some point Randy apparently toyed with the writing of a second episode and found the first ending unsatisfactory in that light, since it seemed to preclude any further adventures of the pig named "Fat."
- Quotation marks are used correctly. I looked back at some second grade writing of Randy's and found many streams of conversation in which the speakers are not identified. He was then beginning to use quotation marks. In this story he uses quotation marks *and* identifies his speakers adequately. Adding the comma to set off conversation ("Oh," said Mark's father) and proper paragraphing have not yet been accomplished.
- The apostrophe is used correctly for the possessive "Mark's" and the contraction "I'm," but left out of "that's" and "you're."
- Capitalization of the entire word "OH" seems to be for emphasis.
- The revision of Randy's opening was done with an eraser. He had made a careful illustration on that page and was perhaps reluctant to mess it up with cross-outs. Third graders frequently lose some effective parts of their writing by erasing first drafts or by starting a second draft without reference to the first. In the next piece of writing Randy is able to integrate part of an earlier draft, actually a lead, into the final product.

Randy: February

"The Playful Otter"

Lead 1:

"The otter plays to make their muscles grow."

Lead 2 and part of the report:

"The otter is in the weasel family. They have webbed feet. . . . The otter loves to play. What they like to play best is to slide down a smooth and slippery mud slide that goes into the water. One of the reasons they like to play is it helps their muscles grow. . ."

More of the report (Randy's own first draft spelling is used here):

"They live in rivers, streams, and marshes. There entrens is under water. There only enemy is man becus they hunt otters for there fir. There only protectshon is to swim away very fast or go in there house. They have about four babie's in the late spring. . ."

- An animal report has been assigned by the teacher. She has also introduced the term "lead" and required the children to write two leads for the report.
- Randy chooses his second lead, but integrates information from the first one into the body of his report.

- Randy is learning to use commas in a series.
- He is willing to make larger changes in his writing. He can move groups of words around now to reorder the sequence of what he has written.
- When asked to circle spelling errors for the purpose of editing, Randy was not able to locate all of them. He found "becus" (because) and "entrens" (entrance), but missed "fir" (fur) and "protectshon" (protection). He also misused "there" (their) and put an apostrophe in the plural "babies."

Randy: April

"A lot of times I get hurt so I go read one of your book's and forget all about my scratches. Ever since I was six I read your books. (It took me about three weeks.) I still read them. . ."

- The class is working on letter writing and Randy decided to write a letter to Beverly Cleary.
- Randy continues to show ability to be specific in his writing and here he also becomes more personal. As a matter of fact he goes on to tell Mrs. Cleary about his favorite parts of her stories.
- Randy is still confused about apostrophes (book's, week's). He was given more instruction on plurals and possessives while editing this letter.
- The use of the parentheses is interesting. While commas and apostrophes may have to be taught, the more striking parentheses, dashes, and exclamation marks rarely need much adult input.

If rough drafts are discarded and finished pieces sent home much of this development becomes lost unless recorded immediately. A complex record-keeping system would be necessary to keep track of progress on the many fronts involved in writing — facility with topic choice, ability to select relevant details, willingness to revise, editing skills, spelling, handwriting, mechanics — the list is endless. All this is covered through the use of writing folders. Furthermore, any supplementary record the teacher may desire to keep is fully documented.

A final dividend — the pleasure children and parents have when dipping into these folders and the sense of accomplishment each student has from seeing the year's work gathered together.

Making the Grade: Evaluating Writing in Conference

by NANCIE ATWELL
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AS TEACHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS of writing change, so do our classroom practices. When we write, look closely at our own and our students' writing, and think about what we see, we begin to teach writing differently. We learn what writers do and need, and we design programs that will meet, support, and extend the development of children's writing abilities.

In addition to showing us how to teach, our understandings as writers and researchers prompt new expectations of our students. We begin to ask children to choose their own topics, writing out of their own needs, interests and areas of expertise. We ask, too, that they demonstrate commitment to their writing, devoting time to gathering, considering and ordering their ideas. We ask them to view the content of their writing as changeable, revising to meet their intentions and their readers' needs for clarity, logic and specificity. And we ask that they understand that readers need correctness; that proper use of conventions will make their writing readable.

Expectations like these grow from an understanding that writing isn't one ability, but a combination of many abilities: experimenting, planning, choosing, questioning, anticipating, organizing, reading, listening, reviewing, editing, and on and on. We know, too, that one piece of writing can't provide an accurate picture of a writer's abilities, but represents one step in a writer's slow growth toward control. The step might be a leap, as a fifth grader discovers she can experiment with different lead paragraphs until she finds one that works best for her story about the birth of her cat's kittens. The step might appear as a regression, as a first-grade writer-of-narratives composes a booklet of one-sentence labels describing a complicated machine in his father's shop. The step might be so small as to almost escape attention, as an eight-year-old famous for her careful erasing crosses out a single line in a draft of her letter to the principal.

Taken over time, over many drafts of many pieces, steps like these do provide pictures of individual writers: where they've been, where they are, and where they might go next. Teachers who save their students' writing know these pictures. We can see children's growth as writers — the topics they found, problems they encountered and ways they solved them, changes they made, and risks they took across the weeks and months that make a school year.

The nature of a student's growth may be clear to us as we page through a collection of his or her writing, but how does what we see translate into a letter or number on a report card? Our new understandings about writing, while changing our classroom practices, don't alter the fact that four or six times each year, most teachers are faced with putting a grade to our students' progress.

The school system where I teach issues quarterly report cards, and I'm required to provide a letter grade for my eighth graders' work in English. Since my English course is a writing program, the letter I put on the card is a writing grade.

In evaluating writing, I know my grading system has to take into account all the abilities that come into play when a writer writes and all of a writer's steps backward and forward toward proficiency. If I'm to do justice to writing as a rich, varied process of growth, I can't grade individual pieces of writing. Painful experiences with pieces of my own writing have shown me that it's hard to write well when trying new modes and chancing complex topics. Out of fairness to my students, wanting them to experiment and discover, I abandoned my rank book. In three years, no eighth grader has asked me to rate a piece of writing. A student writing about the death of his coonhound, his expertise as a lobsterman, or his anger over the principal's decision banning dirt bikes from the school's parking lot, isn't writing for a grade. He has his own criteria.

To look for writing growth, I collect all of my students' writing and file it chronologically in individual folders. Students number their drafts and clip these to their finished pieces. My eighth graders generally accumulate between four and seven finished pieces in their folders each quarter, so that by the end of each nine weeks, I have a mass of each writer's writing to consider. I know nine weeks is not a very long time, even when students write every day, for judging growth. However, given the constraints of a traditional reporting system, these collections of writing are the most reliable basis I have for individual evaluation.

My grading system has to reflect the expectations I communicate to my students in each day's writing class. If evaluation is to be valid, I can't turn around at the end of nine weeks and impose objective standards for "good" writing, grading accordingly. When a student tries her hand at a letter to the editor, attempting to persuade readers of the local paper to vote to close a nuclear power plant, it's the attempt I value first. The writer is trying a new mode — persuasion — and risking a wide, critical audience. I'll help her find and get down her feelings and reasons. I'll ask her to consider the attitudes and needs of her readers. But, when the letter is not particularly well-argued, I won't punish the attempt in my grade book or view it as a failure. My students have taught me that writing growth is seldom a linear progress, each piece representing an improvement over the last.

Students' grades must grow out of what their writing program asks them to do. The expectations I described in the opening of this chapter provide the scaffold for my evaluation. I am looking for each writer's growth in many areas — topic selection, level of involvement, degree of effort and risk-taking, consistency in editing and proofreading, completeness and clarity of content. In order to get at students' progress in these areas, I put my other writing teacher roles on hold during the last week of each marking period, ask my students to rely on each other for response to pieces-in-progress, and spend class time conferring with individual writers on their work of the past quarter.

I hold evaluative conferences because I need my students' help in arriving at the grade I assign their work — they are, after all, the experts on those pages in their folders — and because they need a time to sit back and give some serious thought to what they have done and want to do next in pieces of their writing. The conferences are for both of us.

I schedule five conferences for each fifty-minute writing class. Since ten minutes is too short a time to discuss all of a writer's work, I ask students to prepare by paging through their folders and deciding which pieces they are most and least satisfied with. This writing will serve as the basis for some talk about students' concepts of good writing and knowledge of what is and isn't working in pieces of their writing. I prepare for evaluation by looking through the writing folders and reviewing the entries I've made for each student in my writing conference journal.

The evaluative conference begins as an interview. The student and I sit next to each other, the writing folder in front of us. I ask questions and write down the writer's answers. My questions are concerned with how the student writes and thinks about writing. I've found it helpful and interesting to ask some of the same questions every quarter, because when answers change, this shows me something about my teaching and my students' learning.

In a given evaluative conference, depending on the writer and the writing, I choose from among questions like these (many of which I drew from the research of Don Graves, Lucy Calkins and Susan Sowers):

What does one have to do in order to be a good writer?
What is the hardest part of writing for you?
What is the easiest part?
Which are your best pieces of writing this quarter? What makes them best?
Which piece or pieces are you least satisfied with? Why?
Where do your ideas for writing come from?
Do you have any plans for what you want to write next?
How do you go about making changes in your writing?
Can you tell me why you made this change on your draft of this piece?
What problems are you experiencing with your writing? What do you think you could do to solve them?
What kinds of response help you most as a writer?
Who gives you helpful response?

These are some basic questions; students' answers usually prompt new ones. I take down as much of their talk as I can. At the end of the interview, it's my turn to talk.

Based on what I've seen and noted in a student's writing of that quarter, I describe several specific areas needing the writer's attention. So the student isn't overwhelmed and has a manageable task, I limit these to two or three high priority concerns. As examples, I have asked eighth graders to work on:

Writing more about your personal knowledge — what you care or know about — and less on make-believe subjects.
Trying some different kinds of writing.
Sticking to one topic: narrowing the focus of your pieces.
Including more information about your topics.
Telling more about what you think and feel in your pieces.
Experimenting with different leads or conclusions.
Devoting more time to your writing.
Devoting more effort to self-editing, and editing in a pen or pencil different in color from that of the text.
Using quotation marks when people talk.
Drafting in paragraphs.
Proofreading final copies for omissions.
Circling words that don't look right as you edit, then looking up their spellings.
Using periods: reading finished pieces aloud and listening for the places where your voice drops and stops.

I illustrate my suggestions by pointing out problems as they have occurred in pieces of the student's writing, and I explain why the problem is important in terms of the writer's growth and a reader's needs. I write down the concerns we've discussed, and so does the student. At the end of the next nine weeks, progress in these areas becomes part of the evaluation criteria for that student's writing.

At the end of the conference, I set a grade based on the accumulated evidence of the contents of the writing folder, progress made toward the goals set at the end of the previous evaluation conference, and the writer's thought and effort. I ask the student how he or she would grade the writing and why. Often, we agree, and I explain why I agree. When we don't, I explain what I saw that leads me to assign a different grade. This grade stands. One of my responsibilities as a teacher is to assess, and, in the end, the mark on the card reflects my assessment.

At our school, most teachers of grades K through eight evaluate their students' progress in quarterly conferences. Gloria Walter, Boothbay's seventh-grade English teacher, describes how evaluative conferences work for her: "My quarterly conferences give me another chance to do — in depth — what I went into teaching for: to talk with kids. And the talk is really valuable, because my questions are genuine and serious and their answers are so thoughtful. . . . In terms of grading, I haven't had one protest about ranks since I began evaluating in conferences. The basis for the grade is right there in front of us."

A transcript of a conference between Mrs. Walter and Deedee, one of her students, illustrates how she makes writing evaluation an occasion for talk. Their conference takes place at a table at the back of Walter's classroom. They are conferring on Deedee's third quarter writing. In front of them, twenty-four seventh graders are going about their business — writing, reading, responding, editing, thinking.

Mrs. Walter has pre-printed six questions on a form she's titled "Writing Conference Notes." She begins the conference by writing Deedee's name and the date, April 12, on this form, then asks her first question.

Walter: Deedee, what do you think someone has to do to be a good writer?

Deedee: Don't rush yourself and, sometimes, do lots of drafts.

Walter: Why lots of drafts?

Deedee: Because writers make their writing good by changing it 'til it sounds the way it should. To do that, you need lots of time.

(In November, in response to this question, Deedee said, "To be a good writer, you have to be smart, copy over a lot, and get a good education.")

Walter: Deedee, what's the hardest part of writing for you?

Deedee: Starting to write is always hardest for me. Sometimes I think I'm *never* going to get an idea.

Walter: But you do get ideas. Where do they come from?

Deedee: My best way is to just sit and think about things I've done and then decide which one I want to write about.

Walter: How do you decide?

Deedee: Really, it's just what's most interesting to me.

Walter: What's the easiest part of writing for you?

Deedee: First drafts. Once I start, I just write and write.

Walter: So it comes easily, once you get an idea?

Deedee: Yeah, but then it gets hard again, when I read back over it and find I want to start changing it.

Walter: Which is your best piece of this quarter?

Deedee: Definitely this one. (She picks up her choice.)

Walter: "The Magic Sled?" Why's this one the best?

Deedee: I spent a lot more time on this one, and I thought about it more.

(In November's conference, Deedee characterized the qualities of that quarter's best piece as "good spelling and pretty good cursive.")

Walter: Which piece are you least happy with?

Deedee: The one about the car accident. I hate the beginning, and I still can't think of any way to revise it so it works better.

Walter: When you make changes in your writing, how do you decide what to revise?

Deedee: Sometimes other people's questions help, like my mother's, but mostly by reading it to myself. I pretty much change what doesn't sound right to me.

Walter: Okay, Deedee, based on the writing you did this quarter, there are a couple of things I've seen that you really need to concentrate on. We've talked about both of these lately in conference. The first is including more of your own thoughts and feelings in your pieces. Do you know what I mean by this?

Deedee: Yeah, like when the boat tipped over in my fishing story, and I didn't tell what I was thinking.

Walter: That's right. When you tell your feelings, your reader has an easier time experiencing the story with you. Now, the other thing I'd like you to think about is including details to meet your reader's need for specific information. Do you know why this is important?

Deedee: It makes things seem more real. And it gives readers something to think about. Like in *Lisa, Bright and Dark*, where the author doesn't just tell you Lisa is crazy. He shows you what she says and does, and he teaches you about psychology, too.

Walter: That helps you as a reader?

Deedee: Yeah, it makes it more interesting.

Walter: Okay, Deedee. Let's figure out a grade for this quarter. Last time, your grade was a B+. Since then, you've tried some different kinds of writing, like your poems and script; you've worked on revising so your pieces make better sense; and you've done well with narrowing your topics — for instance, the way you made the babysitting piece specifically about one incident. I think that since you've shown growth in all these areas, this is A− work. What do you think?

Deedee: All right! I've been thinking I'd get an A this time.

Walter: Well, good. We agree. Thank you, Deedee.

At the heart of the evaluative conference is the teacher's knowledge of writing and her students as writers. As writers' levels of development differ through the grades, so do the expectations that shape teachers' instruction and, in turn, the questions that shape their conferences. For example, a second-grade teacher will look for and ask about a writer's invented spellings, knowledge of the functions of punctuation, willingness to change his or her writing, ability to sequence information, and growing sense of audience. She will also ask many of the same questions Gloria Walter and I ask — about concepts of good writing, topic selection and problem solving — because these are concerns for writers at any level.

Evaluating writing in this way takes time. I think the time is worth it. When I give over my English course to writing, and when my writing program is based on what writers do and need, I'm giving my students clear signals about my belief in the importance of their knowledge and experiences. Making evaluation an occasion for us to analyze their writing together gives another chance to extend their involvement and growth. Equally important, the evaluative conference is another occasion for my learning more about my students and their writing.

The Bundle

by HASSE K. HALLEY
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I CONFESS. SOMETIMES all I did was take it out to the car and leave it on the backseat, hoping it would magically disappear. The next morning it was still there, and I knew that sooner or later I would have to face it. I hated it, my husband hated it, my kids hated it, even my cat hated it. But all that hating did not make it go away. It became the bane of my existence. The "it" was the bundle of papers — the bundle of papers that had to be read, that needed a response, that, inevitably, needed a grade.

The nights that I dragged the bundle home only to leave it on the backseat were the nights I found more interesting things to do or the nights I was simply too exhausted to face paper correction. While I tried to ignore the bundle, it nearly drove me out of the profession.

I also tried nearly as many approaches to dealing with evaluating student writing as there are weeks in the school year. Nothing helped. I even began to hate teaching writing. It wasn't just dragging the bundle from school to home and back again or the actual correction, either. It was also the topics my students chose to write about that made me dread my writing classes.

Students chose topics to please me or because the topic was popular or because someone else in the class had already written about it and received a good grade. Topics were chosen for the wrong reasons; they were poorly developed, often illogical and usually boring. It was difficult to justify the amount of time that it took me to read and respond to each paper, especially when students would check the grade, read my comments, and toss the paper into the trash.

The climax of my frustration came the day one of my students wrote about the best form of birth control. It didn't matter to him that he was only fourteen and probably never had sex and knew little about the subject.

"But Mrs. Halley," Tim said, "I thought you would like this subject. You know, sex is interesting."

"Yes, sex is certainly a popular subject, but this paper isn't about sex. It's about the best form of birth control." I knew better than to ask him if he was an authority on the subject — his paper revealed that he understood little about his subject.

"Well," he responded defensively, "I do think the diaphragm is the best form of birth control, even if it is a little inconvenient." He intended to defend his position no matter what.

Right there in the classroom, in front of Tim and all the other students, I burst into tears. Tim didn't know what he was doing, I didn't know how to help him and, out of frustration, I cried. Tim chose a topic he thought I would like. He did not understand the information and so he couldn't write about it. Tim's paper stated that the one flaw in the use of the diaphragm was that each time the woman wished to have sex, she would have to go to her doctor to have the diaphragm inserted. All I could think was that I would be better off at home lying on the sofa watching soap operas and eating bon bons. Anything would be better than teaching writing. The students did not understand my tears.

They were learning to write from a writing text, following my directions, doing exactly what they were assigned. That didn't work. Then, after attending a workshop that taught a formulaic approach to writing, I taught all my students to write paragraphs using a formula. That was great. They could write these mechanically perfect paragraphs that said absolutely nothing. Five years later, after much trial and error and after actively becoming involved in writing myself, I decided on a completely new approach.

I am teaching writing as a process. Students take their writing from the pre-writing stage through writing and revision to editing. Evaluation comes at the very end of the writing process. It is the last step. Therefore, to understand how I evaluate writing, some information about what happens before evaluation is necessary.

After the ninth grade, students choose a one-semester English course they wish to take. In any of my classes, I will have a mixture of 10th through 12th graders. I teach composition. Students learn to write all forms of non-fiction. I teach various essay modes — narrative, descriptive, expository, argumentative — through their own writing.

Classes are held in a workshop atmosphere. We sit informally in a circle or in small groups. Time is set aside in each class for writing and for conferring. At the start of the semester, I tell students that writing is important to me and that I need to be involved in learning about writing as well as teaching writing. While we are together, we are a community of writers, each in charge of our own writing.

Students quickly learn that some pieces of writing get off to a false start, some fall into place easily, and some don't work well even after a great deal of effort. Students learn how to become responsible for their writing. They decide when to start a piece of writing and when to stop it. As writing becomes the responsibility of the writer, so does learning.

This beginning is crucial because students are in unfamiliar territory in a writing workshop. They are a passive audience, accustomed to viewing, accustomed to being told what to do and when to do it. Some students are only motivated by the grade, while others are so passive they would resist nothing. Some resist and question everything, all semester. I even had a principal in a writing workshop who balked at everything for three weeks. "Why do I have to do this?" "This seems dumb to me." "I like my first draft. Let me hand it in."

Having to face that blank page is frightening for students, even principals. They resist and look for excuses to avoid writing. "My dog ate my paper." "I left it on the bus." "I sold it for lunch money." Those questions and excuses are normal. To teach writing, one must have patience and not be defensive. Sometimes I think it would be easier to teach writing the old way, by telling students what to do, when to do it, and how to do it. But then I remember Tim's paper and I think about that poor woman having to go back and forth to the doctor and I resist giving up. Joe Moore (1978) in his article, "A Writing Week," says, "The responsibility for the success of the class is shared between the teacher and the students." That is the reward for being patient with students and for not giving in to my old ways.

After the writing atmosphere has been established, students are divided into small writing groups, about five per group. Students usually begin a draft on Monday. By Friday each writer has copies (photocopy or ditto) of a draft for the other members of the writing group and for me. If students are absent or miss class, they are nevertheless expected to keep up with their writing. Deadlines are essential and late papers are not accepted unless there is a valid reason. Once students accept the responsibility for their own writing, there is little or no problem with lateness anyway.

Each group decides how the Friday papers will be shared: the writer can read the paper, another member of the group can read the writer's paper, or papers can be read silently. These writing groups have been listening to and conferring on drafts all week. The groups are involved in the development of each other's drafts.

By Friday, each piece of writing is fairly well developed, so the kinds of questions members of the writing group ask each other are specific: "What happened to the other introduction?" "Have you said all that needs to be said?" "How developed is the draft?" "Is the paper ready for editing?" "Do you feel like this is as far as you can take this paper?"

After the writing has been shared and students have asked questions about the piece of writing, the writer may also ask the listeners questions about the writing. For instance, "Was the second paragraph clear to you?" "Did the ending make sense?" "Did you get a clear picture of the event?" All of these questions force the writer to re-enter the draft and reinforce the notion that this is still an unfinished piece of writing. If a paper happens to be "finished" during the week, then the writer must so advise the group and the questions will be different. This rarely happens. Once students get involved in the writing process, only the deadline tells them they are finished.

In addition to getting answers to two or three questions, each member of the group selects a paper and writes a more complete evaluation on a student response sheet. This response sheet has three parts: summarize what the writer is trying to say, list ten specific pieces of information found in the paper, and ask two questions about the paper. The response sheet is filled out over the weekend and returned to the writer on Monday.

I also read the drafts quickly and ask two questions of the writer about the paper. I don't make any marks on these drafts because they are "unfinished." It is too soon for me to intrude on the writing. If I mark or comment too early, then the writing no longer belongs to the writer. I will be in control of the writing, not the writer. It takes me about one hour to read twenty-five drafts. Since I rotate among the small groups during the week, I often hear bits and parts of many of the drafts in earlier stages. Most of the writing is familiar to me.

Sometimes students ask for a private conference or they put a paper under my nose and say, "Read this and tell me what's wrong." Rarely do I read that draft. Since they know how to evaluate each other's drafts, they can also learn to self-evaluate. Instead of giving answers, I ask questions: "Why do you want me to read your draft?" "What don't you like about your draft?" "How would you like to change it?" Usually they know what they want to do. This kind of conference takes only a few minutes.

As the semester progresses and writers become more confident, they forget about grades and look for responses that will help their writing get better. In a writing workshop, grades become secondary, while the writing becomes primary. Since they understand right from the start that every paper will not be read or graded, they depend on feedback from each other. They also learn that some papers don't work and never get past the discovery stage, while others seem to come together easily. Failure in a draft is part of the process of learning how to write.

Sometimes groups don't work and students don't confer well, so I change all the groups. Sometimes some students are recalcitrant and find difficulty working in any group. Poor attendance can create problems for the writing group. If students know what my expectations are from the start, and if the goals are made clear, the writing happens and peer evaluation and self-evaluation work.

Responding to each other's writing is essential to evaluation. Otherwise, the bundle of papers continues to be the bane of the English teacher's existence. I once heard a professor say that two years of his teaching career will have been spent reading student papers, 730 days, two solid years. That is a lot of reading. Since students understand that all drafts cannot be read by the teacher, conferences become essential. Peer-group sharing provides the student with the desired response.

Every fifth week students select a draft to work on that will receive a formal letter grade. The writer decides, after conferring and rereading the drafts and peer comments, what revisions are needed. No paper gets edited until the writer feels like the content is clear and complete. Remember, this paper has already gone from brainstorming, through discovery, and through many revisions. Students have responded to it, I have responded to it, and the student selected it knowing the revisions she wanted to make. The paper is ready for editing only after the content is set.

That edited, polished draft, plus all the drafts that preceded it, are then submitted to me for a grade. Students submit their writing folders to me and I keep a checklist that includes the following: the number of drafts written for this piece of writing, thoroughness of the completion of the student response sheet, dates the drafts were submitted, participation and cooperation with the small group, and daily attendance. If the student has earned a check for each requirement, he receives a base grade of C.

Then I skim through the whole packet of papers. I want to see how the paper began, how it developed, what changes took place from draft to draft. Usually papers go from being very broad and brief to being focused and full of specific information. Reading the final draft doesn't take very long because I have already seen parts of the draft, listened to it during a conference, read it in an earlier stage, or even heard about it at the water fountain.

The base grade — that C a student receives for having met the basic requirements of the course — goes up if the final draft is better than a C. If, for example, a student has met the basic requirements and turns in a B paper, the student earns a B. In assigning the grade, content is most important; style, mechanics, organization, punctuation, grammar and spelling follow closely. The important issue is that I do not have to wonder about the grade. It comes naturally as part of the process and is usually no surprise to the student.

I don't put a lot of marks on final copies either. Students work very hard on their final drafts and do not want them marked. It makes them sad to see all their hard work "defaced." Students say those marks are like tracking mud on a clean floor. From a fellow writing teacher, George Voland of South Burlington High School, I have picked up this trick for responding to errors. George taught me the dot system. If there is an error in the line, or something I don't understand, I place a dot in the margin. Not only does this not deface the paper, but it also forces the writer to discover the problem for himself.

At the end of the paper, I do write comments. I write about strengths and weaknesses. Donald Murray (1973), in his article "What Can You Say Beside Awk?," discusses writing comments on students' papers. He is right; there is much more to say beside "AWK."

> Read this aloud . . . Now then, I don't think those words sound like you.
>
> This draft has come a long way from where you began.
>
> Hurrah, you really did it this time. It was fun to read. Share it with your family.

I'm just getting a whiff of what you have to say. You've whetted my appetite, now I want some specifics.

This approach to the teaching of writing and dealing with the bundle of papers works for me. I've learned a lot since Tim's paper and my tears of frustration. I don't think there is a best way or a correct way to deal with evaluation, but I like this approach.

My students tell me they feel freer to make choices in their writing when they don't always have to worry about the grade. They can choose to end a piece of writing in the middle and start all over again because it didn't work, or they can set that piece of writing aside for awhile and come back to it. When grades are made secondary, the writing becomes primary. My task is to get them to write and to keep them writing for as long as we share the classroom. I don't want to worry about grades, so this system also frees me.

And the bundle of papers. Yes, it still exists, but the load is lighter and the reading — well, that's another story.

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Reflections

Time and the Taking of It

by DEBORAH SUMNER
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TIME AND THE TAKING OF IT — a ticking clock moving round, unending like the rhythms of nature. The imposed deadlines in our 9-5 existence. "You've got five more minutes to finish." We feel ourselves out of balance.

Taking time to think things through, to experiment, to discover something new. Writing is the art of cycling back, then moving ahead on some new thread of an idea. It's a way to learn what you didn't know you knew. All writers, regardless of age or experience, must wrestle with similar questions and decisions. What do I *really* want to say? How can I best say it so others will hear?

Without an open attitude toward experimentation and the time to explore, we settle for something less than our best. We seek a quick solution in getting our ideas directly from brain to paper instead of wandering around a bit to see where thoughts might take us. We haven't allowed for the ambiguity, the questioning. We haven't lived through the trodding-onward stages or the jolts that come in the middle of the night. We try to steer our thinking instead of letting it steer us. Nine-year-old Andrea says, "I have to have all the time I want to work on a piece. If a teacher says 'You have to get this done in a week,' then you write fast and you don't want to see the mistakes or problems. You're afraid to find that it's not good, not what you wanted." (Calkins, 1980)

Real writers of all ages know you've got to put up with that period when *nothing* is happening, to get to the good stuff. Katherine Paterson, the 1981 Newbery Award winner, put it this way: "On the good days, you're totally lost (in the story). Those are the days you love. The days when somebody has to wake you up and tell you where you are. But there are a lot of days when you're just slogging along. And you're very conscious of your stuff and the typewriter is a machine and the paper is blank. You've got to be willing to put in those days in order to get the days when it's flowing like magic."

As a writing teacher, I have to keep that idea in the front of my mind. Not every day will be a great learning experience for a particular child. I begin to pay more attention to the whole as well as parts. I become more aware of ebbs and flows of learning. As I gain a better sense of writing as problem solving, I give children more time to write, more time to experiment and to see choices within a piece of writing. I also realize that I as a teacher need time to watch, experiment, and learn.

In the beginning:

Time to write. My slower students sat thinking while others dived in. Thirty minutes on the clock — or less if there had been a lesson. "O.K., time's up. You can finish tomorrow or take it as homework." No one ever took it for homework. And not everyone finished tomorrow. Those were the days *before* I had a classroom, before I had really experienced writing as process. As a fourth-grade competency specialist, my job was to beef up basic writing skills, help students improve story content and strengthen editing skills. My program did have some merit since the children were meeting those basic requirements at a better rate. Still, something didn't click. Some vague discomfort gnawed at me. They could write on demand and produce mediocre stuff. So what?

I began with writing process in the summer of 1981 with the New Hampshire Writing Program. The time element was so obvious. Writers need time to develop their ideas. Good writers draft and revise more. I was experimenting with these elements, too. I believed. I had to give my students time to develop their best.

It wasn't quite that easy. I was supposed to be teaching basic writing skills in two-week time blocks, thirty minutes each day. How could I apply writing as a process? I had to try. It was all the time I had.

As December began, the scene changed. I became a full-fledged third grade teacher. Time stretched before me. I had brought with me a feeling of jerkiness, of unfulfilled beginnings from those two-week sessions with eight different groups. A child would just begin to catch hold of something — a way to revise or a question to ask another child — then, bang. Our time was over — on to the next group. Start again.

Now I had my own class. Here was the chance to begin again, more slowly, so I could watch the unfolding. I no longer felt pressured to cover all of the writing process in two weeks. What could, would my students do with this precious gift of time?

Rules were firm — yellow paper for thinking and experimenting, white paper for final drafts. Jason's folder was full of white paper as his busy mind cranked out a story or chapter a day. He never tried to improve anything. Bang! Crash! The excitement flowed from his pencil. Though his first drafts were superior to many I had seen from fourth graders, he was not looking back, not thinking about what he was doing.

Feeling some conflict about stifling this creative potential, I put myself solidly between Jason and his flow. "Which of these drafts do you want to work on first?" I wanted to see what Jason could do. I wanted *him* to see what he could do. Through group sharing and questioning, his piece evolved through three drafts and a fourth ending. We all agreed that the changes had made a difference. He had started with something good and had taken the time to make it better.

Jason's initial concept of writing was to work straight through to the end. He didn't realize he could go back and improve his story. In accepting the challenge of making information more clear and interesting to his classmates, he learned that he could continue to think about a "finished" piece. Since there could always be room for improvement, he had to sense when *he* was finished with a particular piece.

With Philip there was a different problem. He was a new student without much experience in writing. His first piece was finished in two days, in spite of my best questioning efforts. He needed to settle into our routine and watch what other children were doing. By his third piece, Philip had learned to slow himself and really think about what he was putting down on paper. He tried different leads, wrote three drafts, researched and organized his information. He worked steadily for three weeks. At the end of his final draft, he wrote, "THE END (I think)." Philip had acquired a writer's tentativeness.

When student and teacher become partners in inquiry and learning through writing process, no one stands still for long. We move along through some dynamic, interacting force. As a canoeist learns to read and respond to the energy of a river, the teacher learns to read the child's energy and attempts to guide as the child steers. It's a tricky art and one learned only in the living of it.

The Creative Process

Time — to let the creative tension build, to struggle for solutions to self-set problems. What would artists do if they were under deadlines for producing paintings or sculpture? What part does time play in the creative process? It becomes even more crucial if we see creativity as problem-*finding* as well as problem-solving. Getzels and Csilszentmihalyi (1976) have studied artists and their creative vision over a seven-year period. Artists who were problem-solvers approached the task as something pre-determined and worked to complete it. Problem-finders first set a task for themselves and explored various ways of solving it. The research found that art produced by the problem-finders was much more original. These artists showed more flexibility in their planning and were able to delay closure in solving the problem.

Time is an essential component of any kind of creative endeavor — the ability to delay closure, to follow lines of a new possibility, to try yet another way. With writing process, children find and solve their own problems. A problem is not seen in a negative way. It's a chance to learn — to become a scientist, an explorer. "Is there another way you could begin? What else could you tell me about . . .? Where could you put that information?" The children become aware of their own control and decision-making power. They become aware of different possibilities in their writing and are encouraged to explore them. They become more confident learners, dare to ask their own questions, to plan their own strategies.

Tony was treading into new territory. He had succeeded with "creative writing" and had enjoyed inventing his characters and events. He could always pull laughs from his audience and squeals of "YUK" at his endings. He had a set formula for ending — death. Someone might get blown up with a hand grenade or end up full of worms.

Now he chose his favorite sport, football. He knew just what he wanted to do. "I'm going to tell about these different terms," he said, pointing to a list in the encyclopedia. He chose the most important ones, talked to Teddy about them, and wrote his explanations in simpler words. Everything went smoothly until he came to the ending. This time he couldn't just kill everyone off. The old formula wouldn't work in this new form of writing. His classmates' suggestions and questions didn't help. I wasn't sure how I could help either since this was also a new problem for me. I dipped back into my own experience as a writer. How did I sum things up and gain a sense of the whole? "Sometimes you just have to put it on the back burner in your mind and let it sit for a while. Even if you're not trying to think about it, your brain's working on it. When your answer comes, you'll know."

The next day Tony had his ending. "How'd you get that?" we asked. His hazel eyes snapped with self-assurance. "I just read the whole thing over and knew what I wanted to say next." His question had to have some time to stir around inside before he could find his answer.

Hard stuff, this writing. I don't want my students to think it's easy. (Although at times it just rolls off like magic.) I do want them to gain a sense of control and choice in their writing. I want to help them become aware of what they're learning, of what's working and what's not. I want them to know what the creative person knows — that there is no one right or final solution and that even "mistakes" are valuable for getting closer to the felt truth. I want to give them the time and opportunity to explore, discover, and generate excitement about what they're doing. Hard stuff, this teaching!

The more I learn about the writing process, the more I realize all that I don't know. The more I seek *a* plan to teach it, the more elusive it becomes. I know that if I tried to teach kids solutions instead of strategies, paid more attention to lesson plans than to what I am learning, the process would slow to stagnation. I'd be trying to force the child's energy my way instead of helping him find his own. There's always going to be that tension in my teaching — when to push them forward, when to stand back and let them wrestle with things on their own. No easy solutions, only questions and a better awareness of what I'm doing. I accept that I also need time to explore, to watch carefully, to learn what works and what doesn't. I must continue to look back and reflect so that I may move ahead, constantly recycling that information into more intricate webs of understanding.

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Split Images: Teacher and Learner

by MARNA BUNCE
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"MARNA, WOULD YOU like to read your story for us?" All eyes turned toward me as I fumbled through the papers on my lap, pulling my story to the surface. I could feel the blood draining from my head, a slight dizziness occurring. My hands grew cold and shaky as I took a deep breath to calm myself. Not looking up at the waiting faces, I began to read, "As I climbed the stairs I wondered what Rachel was like. . . ." Irregular breathing caused a jerky quality to my voice. My eyes raced ahead, searching for places to pause that might not be noticeable to my listeners. By the time I finished the one-page story I felt light-headed. "I only know that this house is more special now that I share it with Rachel." Finished! Moments of deafening silence surrounded me as I lifted my head slowly, waiting for comments.

That was my introduction to a six-week writing workshop in which I was student, not teacher. I had taken courses on teaching writing, had written articles for our school and university publications, but had not been involved in writing short stories as a student of writing. I took the workshop because I wanted to improve my writing skills, observe my process of writing, and connect these skills with teaching elementary school children. This was a chance to experience it — in a classroom with assignments, deadlines, criticism, and expectations.

Our first assignment was to write a one-page short story. I thought about various topic possibilities for a day, trying to decide which one would be easy to write and interesting to my classmates. Once I settled on a topic, which occurred after talking to a friend about my options and doing a lot of daydreaming, various openings ran through my mind as I went through the routines of the day. Whenever I could clear my mind for quiet reflections, I mentally worked on my piece. I had already learned that I outline in my mind before I begin to write. Once the story is mentally pictured and the purpose of the story understood, I can comfortably put my pencil to paper.

That evening, I flipped through pages in a magazine as my mind drifted into a stream of consciousness. "Walking up the dirt road, I stopped in awe as my eyes caught the first glimpse of the old farm house, its roof sagging in the middle. The house radiated its past character in the morning sun. Opening the door, I felt myself stepping back. . . ."

I picked up my pencil and began to write. Twelve sentences later I knew I had the introduction I wanted. 12:30 a.m. The mood of my piece was set.

* * *

Eight-year-old Jamie sat staring at a blank piece of paper as I came around the corner of his desk. Looking up, he said, "I can't think of anything to write."

"What can you do to help yourself think of a topic, Jamie?"

"Well (biting a nail), draw a picture . . . look at some books?" Jamie turned to stare out the window, not yet satisfied with his options.

"You can imagine things and write about what you imagined," chimed in Julie, seated nearby.

Jamie, wrinkling his nose, still appeared confused.

"Why not write about something that interests you and you already know about? For example, you helped your father put up a windmill so you know how it works. I know very little about windmills and would find a story about them quite interesting."

"Gosh, windmills are simple, all there is to them is . . ."

"Wait a minute Jamie. Why don't you write the story so others will understand windmills too."

"Okay," Jamie smiled, picking up his pencil.

Later, I returned to find Jamie drawing a picture of a windmill. "Is your story finished, Jamie?"

"No, I got stuck, so I thought I'd think about it as I worked on my picture. I need to ask my father about a few things, so I'll finish it tomorrow."

As I waited for comments about the story I had just read, I looked up to witness a smile across Dan's (the workshop leader's) face. "Would anyone like to comment on Marna's story? Please remember this is her working draft, not a finished story. You should be clear as possible when giving your comments."

Dan's voice sounded distant as I tried to detach myself from my piece. I felt vulnerable, inwardly wanting to close my ears, afraid to listen. At a moment's notice I could shatter into little pieces.

The woman sitting next to me spoke first. "Well, I really liked the story. It kept my interest."

"Why did the story hold your interest?" Dan inquired.

"I liked the way she developed the character Rachel. I felt as though I knew her too."

"I liked how you were able to make the story short, yet clear," added another participant. "That was hard for me to do."

I could feel my body beginning to relax as Dan spoke. "I liked how the reader was slowly pulled into the tension of the story. For example, in paragraph two you connected your recent purchase of the farm to the fact that it was an old house, settled in the late seventeen hundreds. The way you stated it makes me want to know more. I also liked how the story progresses, at the same time setting the mood. Your writing is very subtle until you get half way through the fifth paragraph. Here my concentration is broken by the sharp sounding sentence that follows. . . ."

My mind and emotions were tugging in different directions. I had wanted my classmates to like my story, yet their comments surprised me. I felt my success had occurred without my understanding how I had achieved it. While I was writing, I had not been aware I was being subtle or that I had developed the character Rachel. I tried to keep the comments in perspective, trying to understand the one comment that would help me improve my piece. I had received several positive comments and one suggestion for improvement. Those were odds I would work with.

Once home, I re-read my story and had others read it, trying to figure out how I could continue the mood of the story. Five re-writes later I felt I was ready to return to class.

* * *

Susan took a deep breath after reading the last sentence of her story. A smile spread across her face. "I really like writing about unicorns. They're my favorite animal."

"I can tell by the enthusiasm you put in your voice. The story was interesting, but there are several unclear parts. For example, I'm not clear why the little girl ran into the woods. Also, further down the page you had a wolf appear. How did the little girl know the wolf was watching her? Did she hear a noise or turn around?"

"Well," Susan began, looking down at the floor, "the little girl just went into the woods and there was a wolf."

"That's still unclear. I think you need to work on this part a little more; and would you please correct the misspelled words I've underlined."

Susan turned to go back to her seat, paused, and then wandered over to the craft table. Her paper slipped to the floor as she picked up a chunk of clay.

* * *

During the three weeks that followed, I revised my story thirteen times, cutting sentences, changing words, and rephrasing my thoughts. I felt I had finally accomplished my task, keeping the mood of my story the same throughout. But I wasn't sure and was anxious for comments.

The day of the class arrived. We spent the entire two hours discussing the readings we were assigned. It was difficult for me to keep my attention on our discussion. I kept looking up at the clock, hoping time would back up. Dan had stated early in our session that there would be time for those who wanted to read to do so. I continuously shuffled my papers, shifted my position, and gazed out the window, waiting to be called on, but to no avail. Reading in class compared to standing in front of a mirror, seeing hidden features of myself rise to the surface. For a few moments I was the most important person in the world. I wanted to learn more about myself. But this day was different. This day I would not read. I kept telling myself it was silly to depend upon outside approval. I had enrolled in this workshop to improve my skills, not for pats on the back. Yet, here I was, feeling neglected. By the time I drove home, I was frustrated and grouchy. I needed time to put the morning behind me.

The next day, I saw Dan at a baseball game. As we were speaking, he said, "Oh, by the way I read the copy of your story you left with me. I really like it and I can't wait to talk to you about it."

"I wonder what changes he liked," I said to myself, feeling the enthusiasm for writing swell within me. The next day I found myself thinking about a new story, excitement filling my veins.

Class came and class went the next week. I did not have an opportunity to read my story. As I quietly exited from the classroom, I felt tired of the writing workshop and tired of writing. My energy for writing was gone.

* * *

Peter arrived at my desk in the middle of a conference with Jennifer.

"I can't right now, Peter, but I will add your name to the list of conferences today."

"I really want you to read what I've written. I'm not sure what to do now."

The writing period ended and I did not have a chance to listen to Peter's story. "Can you read my story at recess, Ms. Bunce?"

"I'm sorry, Peter. I have to prepare for our afternoon science class."

The rest of the afternoon was filled with activities and I forgot to find time to read Peter's paper. The next day, as I was checking to see who needed conferences, I was surprised Peter did not raise his hand.

"Peter, do you want to confer with me?" I asked.

"No, I decided I didn't like that story so I threw it away."

* * *

Our last assignment was to write a story using the writing techniques we had learned and not used during the course of the workshop. The story, still of our choosing, was to be approximately four pages in length.

Several ideas easily popped into my head, but I kept rejecting them. Not understanding why I was having difficulty choosing a story, I decided to begin writing introductions hoping I would feel comfortable with one once it was on paper. The stories sounded boring on paper, yet when I *told* them to a friend, they came alive. What was the difference? After scrutinizing my experiences with storytelling I realized the missing ingredient was dialogue. Up to now my writing was basically narrative with a few scattered quotes. This was not true in my storytelling nor in the readings required in my course. Published authors seemed to be masters at developing their characters through dialogue.

Again, after a couple of days' contemplation, I began my story about an adventure my son and his friend had a few summers back. I tried to remember their mannerisms and speech patterns as I began to write. I was not concerned with anything other than getting my ideas down on paper. When I got stuck on the dialogue, I reverted to narrative with the intent to reverse it after my first draft was written. The writing of this story was, beyond a doubt, the most difficult I had ever done. I bit my nails, munched on food, wrote an hour, went shopping, and refused to talk to anyone until I completed entire sections. Frustration mounted as I felt what I was trying to do was beyond me. I'm not sure what pushed me to continue writing the story, but I did.

I was taking risks I'd never considered taking before. It was as though I were climbing a mountain, not knowing for sure where to put my next step or if I'd make it to the top. The workshop had provided maps of skills for me to follow, and it had taken me on short trips in technique, but only I could complete the task.

I now understood why I needed to read my story each class period, why I depended on comments from others. I had been risking since I signed up for the workshop and, because I had risked, I needed the cairns of criticism to guide my way. A friend once said to me, "When I risk, I want at least a reaction from someone. The worst thing to do to me if I risk is to ignore me."

* * *

"Dick, would you read your story to us? You have learned how to use descriptive words quite well. The way you described your cat made me wish I owned him."

Dick smiled as he crossed the room to my waiting arms. I placed my hand on his shoulder as he straightened up and began, "I remember the first day Freckles came to our door. . . ."

Safety

by ELIZABETH PARILLO
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I WANTED TO WRITE about safety: Random House says it is freedom from risk. Safety had become important to me this week. It's the last week of our writing program. I had opened myself up to many people and could sense that I was beginning to fear the end, which I knew would hurt. Intense relationships would suddenly be severed and I wanted to start backing away now, rather than be wrenched apart on Friday. It would be safer, less painful this way.

For another thing I didn't want to fail. I've learned so much about the writing process that I was afraid to write: afraid that my piece wouldn't reflect "intelligent organizational principles." I used many of these automatically before I came and studied them. Now they loomed as part of a huge monster critic, waiting to pounce on me as I stumbled.

I wanted to find a safe topic. One I could easily focus, expand, refocus, summarize and close: neatly meshing everything together. I wanted one where I wouldn't reveal too much of myself, just letting a little of me show through. I feel as if I have already revealed more than I wanted anyone to know. I used to think I could protect myself with a safe topic or a distant point of view.

I find I can't even hide behind my topic because my grammar usage gives me away. You can tell where I am by looking at my verb choice, tense, and form. The subjunctive suggests my tentativeness; gerunds and participles give my inner struggle away, as I try to determine who I am. Then there's the problem of proportion and dialogue. And as if that isn't enough, the damn questions keep appearing in almost every paragraph. I like questions now, even better than answers.

Now I know there are no safe topics. I have nowhere to hide, even from myself. Maybe that's why I had so many false starts this week. As soon as *I* began to emerge, I ran for cover and a new sheet of paper.

There are also no safe words. Every word does say I AM, and I AM is not a safe concept. Writing is creativity and creativity is dangerous. It doesn't have any boundaries: its source is infinite and its direction unknown. But, also, there is the joy of discovery, the element of surprise, coming to a new place, often a place of affirmation. To write is to risk success, as well as failure.

I decide I want to write. I want to be a part of growth and discovery. I want to hear my voice and share it. I want to learn to trust in the process, going with it to see where it wants to take me, letting new thoughts emerge. Later I can step back, look at it, revise and refine it. If necessary I can redefine the boundaries, reshape the piece to fit the new meanings, tighten it up, make sure it's logical. I want to make the conventions work for me, instead of trying to fit myself into a mold.

Writing is being moved and moving others. In order to do this something within me has to start moving: a haunting that wants to be expressed — a point of inspiration — a stirring or a stream that might become a volcano or a waterfall. If I am frozen in fear I can't hear it and move with it. Part of me wants to know where I am going. Another part of me wants to explore unknown territory. This is the tension and insecurity of the process. In my desire for safety I had been listening to the part of me that wants to know where it is going, that wants to avoid the tension. Now I am willing to live with that tension.

In writing I am also a hunter, trying to capture the moment. It is elusive and already gone. I know this, yet I still extend my hand, try to catch it, try to hold onto it, to savor it. It has slipped away. I can only reshape it, restate it, remake it now. Looked back upon tomorrow it will be different, as I will be in a different time and place. Yet if I have made a statement of the essence, even in new language, I will resound with it. It will have meaning. Instead of being a hunter I become an artist — if I can get to the feeling behind the incident or episode, if I can get to the essence and not smother it in my grasp as I sometimes try to do.

I don't want safety, because I like to write, and there is no safety in writing. I can try to use the words as a camouflage but I can't hide from a perceptive reader especially if I am that reader. I am learning to live with the insecurity of the process, with the creative anxiety. Yes, you *can* know me through my words. Where am I going? I won't know until I get there. When I'm finished I see: "So that's what I was trying to say." The tension is momentarily resolved, and I am in a new place.

I am changing and need a new definition of safety; where safety is trusting in myself, finding me and my voice, finding my own way. I know I need boundaries, form, but I want to be creative within that form or let the creativity shape the form. The organizing principles can be used by me, not held up as a judgmental standard.

What happened to the safety of the first paragraph? I decided that safety, freedom from risk, meant stagnation and suffocation, not growth. I want to grow.

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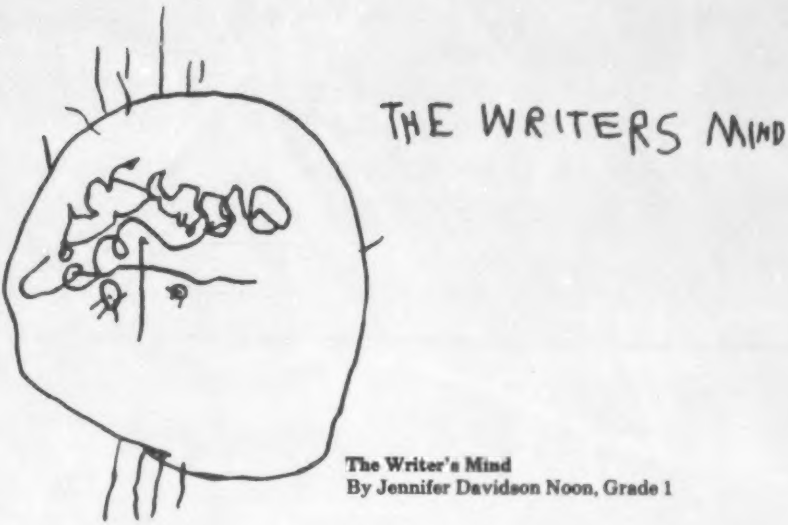

The Writer's Mind
By Jennifer Davidson Noon, Grade 1

The classroom teacher has a special window on the writer's mind and can witness each student's daily struggles and achievements. **Understanding Writing: Ways of Observing, Learning, and Teaching** is a book for all K-8 teachers because it is written by teachers. It contains 20 articles on writing development, writing assessment, writing conferences, the relation of writing to drawing and reading, and more.

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Nancie Atwell *teaches eighth grade English at Boothbay Region Elementary School. She is also director of the Boothbay Writing Project, a program aimed at improving the teaching of writing and at helping teachers become writing researchers.*

J. Dennis Robinson, *a university and secondary school teacher, designed the cover and acted as consultant to the editors and publisher.*

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